A TALE
OF THE THAMES



TO

HARRY HYLTON-FOSTER

*This Story is inscribed*

*By his old Friend*

THE AUTHOR



"IT DID NOT TAKE HIM LONG TO SCALE THE EMBANKMENT."

# A TALE OF THE THAMES



*By*

J. ASHBY-STERRY

*the Author of The Lazy Minstrel & A Naughty Girl &c.*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN VERSE BY THE AUTHOR AND FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE BY W. HATHERELL R.I.

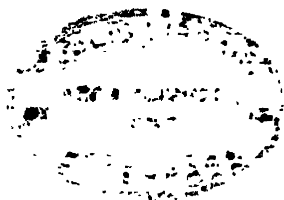
LONDON:

BLISS SANDS & Co.

MDCCCXCVI

# CONTENTS

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



# CHAPTER FIRST

## *ALL ON A SUMMER'S MORNING*

*"The best of authorities all are agreed*
*The Source of the Thames is in Trewsbury Mead!"*
BYSTANDER BALLADS.

"IT is the very finest morning I ever recollect!" said Guy Stillmere to Ralph Claymer.

And so it was. The reader will naturally ask where? The opening scene of our story is laid in Gloucestershire and the period is yesterday. If you want a scene within a scene, it will be necessary to indicate the pastoral prospect of Trewsbury Mead, and if you require a time within a time, one might name between ten and eleven o'clock on the brightest of mornings at the beginning of June. It was one of those rare occasions when the country appears at its very best—one of those old-fashioned June days which seems to combine the freshness of May

agreeably mellowed by the warmth of July—when the beauty of blossom still lingers, and when the bright green of the pastures and the young life of the foliage seem to absolutely revel in the warmth of genial sunshine.

It was a morning when the very fact of existence was a pleasure; when you were quite content with simple surroundings; when to bask in the bright sunshine, to inhale the fragrant breeze, to listen to the music of the leaves, to gaze on the cloud-flecked sky, to hear the song of the birds and the distant lowing of cattle gave you untold joy. It was an occasion when you had a pastoral symphony all to yourself, and wondered how you could experience such exquisite delight from materials so apparently simple, and derived the keenest pleasure from a rare harmony of colour, sound, and scent. No wonder one man said to the other, "It is the finest morning I ever recollect."

The scene and the time having been described, possibly a word or two with regard to the figures introduced into the landscape may not be amiss. The speaker was a tall, well set-up man of about thirty, with black hair,

and a dark complexion which had become well-nigh mahogany-coloured by the action of the sun. His companion was fair as to moustache, ruddy as to countenance. He might have been eight-and-twenty, and he was not quite so tall as his friend. They were two typical Englishmen, fairly athletic, but they were neither unreasonable golfmaniacs, violent footballophiles, nor fiery untamed cyclists; they especially cultivated an exercise that seems to stand a chance of altogether falling into disuse, namely, that of walking.

It was the pursuit of this natural but neglected pastime that had brought the two, after an excellent early breakfast at the King's Head, Cirencester, vigorously tramping along the Tetbury Road as far as Thames Head Bridge. From the bridge they descended to the towing-path of the nearly dry canal, thence they wandered down the bank into the pleasant meadow, hoping to discover the Source of the Thames. Our two friends had a vague notion of making a tour of the Thames, partly on foot and partly by boat or canoe, but as yet they had no very definite view on the subject.

"You'll see," said Ralph Claymer to his companion as they lazily lounged along, having

the steep, tree-covered bank of the canal on the one side, and from time to time catching a glimpse of the railway in the distance on the other. "You'll see directly this breeze dies down, as it probably will in the course of an hour, it will be a piping hot day, and I doubt if we reach Cricklade to-night."

The breeze, however, seemed by no means inclined to die away at present. It rose suddenly, it ceased abruptly. It blew from time to time in gusts that fluttered the foliage and played countless leaf-lyrics amid the bending branches. It came with a rush like a distant echo of sea on the shore, and then it died away into silence, then came again with a muffled *crescendo* and once more lapsed into the faintest of fitful flutters. It was one of those mornings that inspired you with the keenest exhilaration, that made you think that, despite all man, aye and woman too, has done to spoil it, this world is a very beautiful one, and that the English climate, notwithstanding all our growling and grumbling, is the very finest in existence.

Though Claymer had visited this neighbourhood many years ago and thought he was an excellent guide to the Source, they appeared

to have a good deal of difficulty in finding it. They were continually coming to a halt and thinking they had passed the exact spot. Ralph was always saying he knew it by a particular tree; but as there seemed to be a strong family likeness between all the trees in these parts, and as he had named at least half a dozen that he was quite sure as the right one, his friend was getting somewhat distrustful and out of patience. They came to a sudden stand in the hot sunshine, and Guy tilted his hat over his nose to keep the blinding glare out of his eyes, and stood with his legs wide apart swinging his stick against the turf.

"Curious," said Guy, "this simple landscape and the absence of people makes me feel quite pastoral. Instead of being in tweed suits and sporting walking-sticks, we ought to be clad in sheepskins and carrying crooks. And instead of talking common sense, we ought to sing 'Fa, la, la!'"

"'Down in a flowery vale, all on a summer's morning,'" trolled out Ralph in a fine baritone voice. "Quite agree with you. I feel that I am quite the shepherd swain. I begin to fancy myself to be a Strephon or a Corydon. But then, you know, we ought to meet Amaryllis

and Chloe and Phyllis—'Phyllis I spied, fair nature's self adorning!'—and all kinds of delightful nymphs, and foot it merrily on the greensward."

"No, no!" answered his friend, somewhat gruffly. "The great charm of this place is the absence of such annoyances. I often think how bored the shepherd swain must have been. He never could enjoy a quiet pipe all to himself—a musical one, I mean—without one of those impudent damsels bouncing out from some neighbouring bush and annoying him with her absurd capering and singing. Tell you what it is, old man, this Thames Head is as difficult to discover as the Source of the Nile, and I must say I don't look upon you as a Livingstone or a Stanley, or a Grant or a Speke, or whoever those Johnnies were who discovered it. I vote we give it up and go back. Here comes the breeze again. It strikes me very forcibly ——"

What struck this unbeliever very forcibly will probably never be known, for at that very moment his hat was struck very forcibly by a smart little sailor-hat, flying before the breeze, and the pair of hats went rolling up the mead and gambolling after one another as

if they were absolutely endowed with life and thoroughly enjoyed the fun of the thing. At the same moment a voice was heard to say, "O, you silly girl!" and this was followed by a silvery symphony of girlish laughter, in which a musician might have detected the tones of three executants. Guy glanced in the direction of the sound and saw a sweet, merry, girlish face, framed in foliage, with stray strands of fair hair gleaming in the sunshine, and at once started in search of the wandering hats.

Ralph also noted the pretty picture; then he saw the foliage frame was widened, the picture was added to by another laughing damsel, and while he gazed a third pretty face, with wondrous brown eyes flashing with merriment, gazed upon him above the other two. "Three Nineteenth Century Graces," thought he to himself. He was surprised to hear the centre, and perhaps the oldest, at any rate the rather more dignified of the Three Graces mention his name, and putting up his eye-glass he recognised one of the group as the wife of Colonel Torneywayne, whom he knew passing well. It did not take him long to scale the embankment and shake hands with the lady.

"Whatever are you doing here, Mr. Claymer, away from London in the height of the season?" she asked.

"Well, Mrs. Torneywayne," he answered, "I was just about to ask you the same question. We, however, are looking for the Source of the Thames ——"

"Exactly what we're trying to find, but can discover nothing but a dry canal. I forgot, you don't know my nieces—Mr. Claymer—Miss Phyllis Feyton, Miss Dora Daynflete."

And Ralph raised his hat to two of the freshest, brightest, prettiest girls he had seen for a long time.

"We're staying for a few days at the Dappletons', near Tetbury, and we got up very early this morning and drove over to find the Source of the Thames. Colonel Torneywayne joins us later on, and we talk about doing a bit of the Thames, but our plans are quite uncertain. We left Weatherbrow with the waggonette on the bridge. Oh, here comes your friend with the hat. I am afraid he has had a great deal of trouble."

Most assuredly Stillmere had had no small task to capture the truant hats, for they both seemed to be endued with a species of madness,

with a spirit of wild frolic, with a feeling of mischievous fun, and though Guy started with a dignified walk, and threatened the runaways gravely with his stick, he was obliged eventually to trot pretty briskly. After they had chased one another for some distance they reached the shelter of a bush, where they lay quite still and pretended to be dead hats, and he was just on the point of clutching them when they started on another madcap chase. Eventually, at the risk of knocking in the crown, he secured his own with his walking-stick, and then the light-hearted straw, with its pretty scarlet ribbon, led him a rare dance.

Having got a good start, it kept the advantage and trundled along merrily. It hid itself in the long grass, it got entangled in bushes, and finally lay down apparently quite out of breath and exhausted, and allowed itself to be captured at the very verge of Thames Head. Guy took it up and shook it rather roughly, saying somewhat bitterly, "Caught you at last, you little flirt. I dare say your mistress is quite as frivolous, as uncertain, and as aggravating as you are," and then, dusting it tenderly with his

handkerchief, he strolled deliberately back to the group on the embankment, and was duly introduced.

"I am afraid you have had a deal of trouble with my silly hat," said Phyllis, placing it on her head, and endeavouring to pat her refractory tresses into order.

"We can't find the Source of the Thames," said Mrs. Torneywayne, "and Mr. Claymer, who ought to know all about it, doesn't seem to be able to help us, and," she added, looking at her watch, "we ought to be going back to Tetbury."

"I was telling Ralph, do you know, that I thought he was a bit of a fraud just before the flight of the hats, which gave me a glorious run over a difficult country. And it was your hat," he said, turning to Miss Feyton, "that guided me to the exact spot. So I can show you all where it is."

"I'm afraid we've hardly time," said Mrs. Torneywayne, looking at her watch.

"Oh, nonsense, Auntie, we must see it," interposed Maud, "so come along at once."

And the whole party clambered down the embankment and walked up the meadow under Guy's guidance.

"You see the way I'm ordered about by my nieces, Mr. Claymer. I'm afraid I haven't the art of preserving the majestic dignity of an aunt."

"No, I should think not, you silly auntie," cut in Phyllis, "when we were all at school together ——"

"Yes, but I was a big girl and you two were little ones, and it's a shocking thing to say, but I'm certain that you don't treat me with half the respect you did then."

Ralph glanced at the three, and he did not believe there was much difference in any of their ages. They do not proceed very far before they begin to be conscious of a line of brighter greenness in the grass, of here and there stream-worn boulders, of occasional puddles and certain indications of the bed of a rivulet. Presently Ralph looks up and is quite certain he has found his tree this time. Guy stops, directs attention to a spot hard by the canal embankment, shaded by bushes and overshadowed by trees. They listen, and amid the faint flutter of the foliage they hear from time to time an intermittent trickle, a sort of occasional tick, like a demoralised cricket, or a lazy clock of

irregular habits, and they find they have discovered the tiny silver thread, which, as it strengthens and brightens and flows away towards the sea, represents such a kingdom of infinite enjoyment, such an empire of poetry, such a world of romance.

"Then this is *really* the Source," said Phyllis. "Captain Clabberdash would have it that it was somewhere near Cheltenham, at a place called the Seven Springs."

"Then don't you believe him for a moment, Miss Feyton," cut in Claymer, "especially after your pilgrimage here to-day. Old Leland settled that matter more than three centuries and a-half ago, and every one who knows anything about it is of his opinion."

"Well, I must confess I am a wee bit disappointed," said Mrs. Torneywayne, "because I know in an old book we have at home there is a wondrous picture of this spot where the Source is represented as a veritable cataract, boiling and foaming all over the place."

"Just what those artful artists used to do in the good old times when nobody travelled," said Stillmere, "but won't go down in these days of the universal kodak and perpetual snap-shooter."



"'THEN THIS IS REALLY THE SOURCE?' SAID PHYLLIS

"It's a pretty little spot, and I like it all the better because it isn't labelled and there is no guide to show the way," said Phyllis.

"Really, Phyl, you're too bad, after Mr. Stillmere took all the trouble," said Dora; and Ralph laughed heartily.

"I didn't mean that, Dora!"

"Well, after all," said Guy, "Miss Feyton was the guide, or rather her hat was, for it lured me on to this very spot, and then refused to go any further. And here I encountered an ancient tiller of the earth, who confirmed my suspicions that this is the identical spot!"

"If you are all going to dispute as to who is the Columbus of this expedition, we shan't get back to Tetbury in time for luncheon. So come along, girls!" said Mrs. Torneywayne.

The whole party climbed the embankment and went back by the canal towing-path up to Thames Head Bridge, where they found a waggonette, somewhat heavy in construction but drawn by a pair of powerful horses, and evidently built on a special plan and arranged for every comfort—which, by the way, is seldom to be found in vehicles of this description. Weatherbrow was on the box, and Weatherbrow touched his hat—evidently a good old

family retainer was Weatherbrow—the ladies were all helped in chattering and laughing.

"Give my kind regards to the Colonel," said Ralph.

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Torneywayne, with a pretty flash of those marvellous brown eyes, "and I hope we may meet on the Thames later on and further down. Thank you so much for acting as guide, Mr. Stillmere."

The two men raised their hats, the horses broke into a trot, and the waggonette disappeared in a cloud of dust in the direction of Tetbury.

## CHAPTER SECOND — *THE BABY THAMES*

> "*At last the oft-bridged brook some dignity attains,*
> *And babbles with a swirling song through Ashton Keynes.*"
>
> LOST LAYS.

"'DOWN in a flowery vale, all on a summer's morning. Phyllis I spied——'" sang Claymer.

"Going off in a waggonette to Tetbury, and taking her pretty aunt and her fascinating friend along with her, and, thank goodness, leaving us in peace ——" said Stillmere, cutting short his friend's song.

"Why, you old ruffian, they are all of them delightful."

"Yes, yes, I know Mrs. Torneywayne is very charming, so is Miss What's-her-name—O Phyllis, is it?—so is Miss Dora, but we came down here for absolute repose and quiet, didn't we?"

"Torneywayne? Torneywayne? The name's familiar to me. She cannot be the wife of

a Colonel Torneywayne I once met at the Todladle's. He must be years older than she is."

"Well, so he is. He must be over fifty, and she, I fancy, is a little over five-and-twenty. But in reality he is as young as she is. He knew her, I'm told, first of all when she was a little bit of a schoolgirl. It was quite a love match; they have two little girls. The whole affair has turned out splendidly—though I have heard people shook their heads over it a good deal at the time. By the way, where did Mrs. Torneywayne say they were staying?"

"Don't remember," answered Guy, somewhat shortly. "I don't know and I don't care. But wherever it may be, I trust they'll not swoop down upon us at all kinds of unexpected places on the Thames!"

"Swoop down? That's civil, seeing I have introduced you to one of the most charming women in the world, and she introduced you to two of the prettiest girls you could wish to behold! Now, you grim, perverse old Guy, you hopeless mysogynist, tell me candidly, do any of those delightful ladies look like 'swoopers?'"

"Possibly not, but that's no reason why

they shouldn't swoop, and if they do, the whole enjoyment of our trip is at an end, and we had much better walk straight to Kemble Junction and take the first train up to town!"

"Well, Kemble's all on our way, so we'll go in that direction and see about it."

They left the road, went over a stile, and along rich pasture land which often became damp and in some places muddy. They began to be conscious of a tiny rivulet which occasionally received tinier tributaries. Gradually it widened; the sedges and water-plants became more frequent, sometimes it rippled musically against some obstruction, and, after the watercress-beds had been passed, there was no doubt whatever about its becoming a tangible brook. As they advance through the long grass the brook broadens, the reflections become more varied and beautiful, the water is as clear as crystal, and its dimpled bed, with its bright pebbles and its sinuous weeds, is clearly perceptible.

Following its course pretty closely, the embankment of the branch line from Kemble to Cirencester comes in view, and then something like a rhythmic and continuous rustle of

foliage is heard. The breeze has altogether died away, so it cannot be that. As they approach they find it to be the music of the first fall—practically, indeed, the first weir—the tiny forerunner of some fifty successors that are designed to keep Father Thames in order on his way to the sea. You cannot, however, dignify this babbling brook by such a paternal appellation. It is most emphatically the Baby Thames, and the Baby Thames it will remain, at any rate, till it reaches Cricklade.

Just beyond the first weir is the first bridge, an ancient, picturesque, stone structure, with three low arches; too low even to admit the passage of a small canoe. Passing across the bridge and under the railway arch, the two pilgrims come to a halt.

"Now," said Ralph, "if you're going up to town, Kemble Junction is to your right; there's a train at about twelve-thirty, and we've plenty of time to catch it."

"But, look here," replied Guy, laughing, "our luggage has all been sent on to Cricklade, and I'm beginning rather to enjoy this peaceful strolling. Besides, I did'nt come down here to go train-catching, did I? And, after all, I don't suppose we shall meet them again, and if

we see that waggonette looming in the distance, we can hide behind a hedge, and, if the worst comes to the worst, we can run up to town after all!"

"Guy," replied his friend, lighting a pipe, "I begin—puff—to think—puff—you are—puff, puff, puff—a real old humbug. However, since I'm not allowed to go up to town, on we goes to Ewen. But, I tell you what, this Baby Thames is so very erratic in these parts—it twists, it turns, it curls first this way and then that—that if we follow its course religiously, we shall not only be considerably bored, but we shan't reach Cricklade for three weeks. We must take short cuts."

Acting on this suggestion they took a pathway across the fields, losing the stream for a time, then seeing it for a few minutes, then losing it again. They pass into the quaint hamlet of Ewen, bear away to the right, and, once more crossing the Thames, they take a series of pleasant pathways that eventually lead them to another bridge. Beyond this they follow a path for a considerable distance beside the gliding stream. The cool and refreshing gusts of wind that blew fitfully in the earlier part of the morning

had entirely died away and the weather began to be prodigiously hot. It was mighty restful when they reached Somerford Mill—now the first mill on the Thames—to sit down for a while beneath the shade of the big elms, to gaze upon the picturesque building and listen to the musical plash of the water.

"Well, now, this is what I call something like rest," exclaimed Guy, as he took off his hat and lighted a pipe. "Why not stay here altogether? I wonder whether the merry miller would let lodgings. What joy it would be to remain here for the summer—away from the busy hum of man and the no less busy humbug of woman!"

"Order! Order!"

"I say, why not remain here, far from the madding crowd of men, and equally distant from the gadding crowd of girls ——"

"Why? Because you would be sick of it in a week. And because a girl happens to fall out with you, or you choose to quarrel with a girl—or, at any rate, you agree to differ and part company, there is no reason whatever that you should declare war against entire girldom, and sneer indiscriminately at womankind. Depend upon it, my dear Guy, there's ——"

"As good fish in the sea as ever came out of it? Yes, I knew you were going to say that. I've heard the quotation before. Like all old proverbs it is absolutely wrong and entirely illogical. Why does not some one start a 'Society for the Disestablishment of Ancient Proverbs'? There is not one of them but could be absolutely demolished by the application of a little common sense, and yet we adopt them as the infallible axioms of life."

"For instance?"——

"Well—'where there's a will there's a way'—I happen at the present moment to be particularly thirsty—I am very willing to remedy that state of things, but I see no means of carrying it into practice."

"Easy enough. Instead of lolling in the shade and smoking, you must be on the tramp again, and in a little while you may be within a measurable distance of proving the truth of the ancient proverb you recite."

"Yes, probably get something when I have ceased to care for it. Your argument, my dear Ralph, is a very lame one, but at any rate I think we might be on the move again. Where are we going to have luncheon?"

"Well," answered his friend, "I'm not quite

certain. Not before Ashton Keynes, certainly, and possibly nothing but eggs and bacon even there. We might make a little *détour* and get a drink at Somerford Keynes and look at All Saints Church."

And so, after walking some little distance, they bore away to the left, and, pausing for a while to gaze on the picturesque church, eventually entered the village. Just as they were crossing the main street, Guy happened to see a waggonette and pair coming quickly towards them through the dust. He seized his friend by the arm.

"There they are again," he shouted. "Not a moment to be lost."

And he dragged Ralph across the road, violently thrust him into a little hostelry called the Bakers' Arms, and gazed between the plants in the window as the carriage whirled by. The occupants happened to be a dignified, white-haired old lady, a lot of rosy children, who were apparently her grandchildren, and a nursemaid.

"Hah! False alarm," said Stillmere, with a sigh of relief. "But, you know, it gave me quite a turn. I began to think we were cornered ——"

"Well, upon my word," answered Claymer, "I think you're a real idiot. If you're going to conceal yourself every time a waggonette comes in sight, our Thames tour will be anything but restful. You're nearly as bad as Captain Cuttle running away from Mrs. MacStinger ——"

"'Stand by,' as the immortal Captain would have said. What are you going to drink? What have you got?" he asked, turning to the landlady, who regarded him with an air of faded surprise.

"We've got some nice mild ale, sir."

"Good! And ginger-beer?"

Yes, she had that too. They were both fairly cool, and Guy speedily concocted a big jug of shandygaff, which he and his friend consumed with much content.

## CHAPTER THIRD — *A MERRY PARTY*

> "*The laughter of lasses, the song of the stream,*
> *The beauty of blossom—a sweet summer dream!*"
>
> MIDSUMMER MADRIGALS.

EMERGING from this quaint little hostelry, and somewhat revived by the rest and refreshment, the two explorers, after lounging for a while in the picturesque churchyard of All Saints, once more sought the Thames. They did not have to go far before they came in sight of it. Sauntering through the village, they presently behold it sparkling in the sunshine, and after they pass the Lower Mill they enjoy a delightful stroll along the banks. About half a mile below the mill they come to a bridge, one of the first of those made of slabs of stone which are so frequent in this part of the country. They cross this and continue their walk on the right-hand side of the stream.

The river here widens somewhat, and presently they find it edged with trees on each

side, which gives a novel phase of beauty to the scene. They are particularly struck with the purity and clearness of the water as it flows silently on. There is a certain amount of deliberate ease and dignity in its almost imperceptible movement that you would think its mission was ornamental water in a ducal park and nothing more, that it would never condescend to turn mills, to float boats, to support regattas, to be in any way associated with trade or any of the numerous avocations it undertakes long before it reaches the sea.

Pausing at another stone bridge by the Eight-Acre Copse, the travellers are especially struck with the picturesqueness of the scene; for here the plantation gets much thicker on each side of the stream, and the view of the surrounding country is altogether excluded. Presently the plantation ceases suddenly, and they pass through pleasant pasture land, having on the left the picturesque old Manor House, with its old-fashioned garden, brilliant with flowers. They noted the old-world flavour of the place, the air of unostentatious comfort that pervaded it; they observed the substantial, irregular character of the architecture, the big massive entrance gates; they

saw a handsome collie who barked good-naturedly at them, a small boy who was trying to fish; and they heard the clink of glass and the rattle of knives, and saw through the open window a buxom maid-servant preparing the table for dinner.

"Now, why," said Stillmere, "have I not an uncle living at this Manor House, and why can't we drop in and have luncheon with him? Probably if my uncle lived here I should have quarrelled with him long ago, and if we attempted to call on him, he would most likely have set that collie dog at me."

"No doubt," remarked Claymer.

"I always find your relations make a point of living at the most uninteresting places in the world—places that you never by any chance want to visit; places that, if you are ever compelled to go to, you always want to get away by the next train ——"

"But is that the fault of the place or your relations? And if they didn't live there, wouldn't you be disposed to like the place?"

"Possibly. There's a vast amount of fiction about relations. I hold that the mother-in-law is always over-abused and 'Uncle John' is ever over-praised. *How* the latter has been

exalted by the illustrated papers as long as we can remember! That senile, doddering, avuncular humbug, you must remember, always arrives in a snowstorm, literally padded with presents, attended by porters staggering under hampers of good things. *I* never had an Uncle John, and if I had he wouldn't have come to see me, and if he had come he wouldn't have given me anything—except advice——"

"Good afternoon, sir!" said a maiden, who was leading a white calf and had her pink sun-bonnet tilted forward over her tawny tresses.

"Delightfully pastoral," remarked Claymer. "Quite like a picture by George Mason, and hair of the true Titian tint."

"And how primitive! It is only a little after one, and she says 'Good afternoon.' As a matter of fact, she's perfectly correct—but it sounds odd. Any one wandering about here after six would probably be regarded as a roysterer. I really think," he added, as he gazed around, "this is one of the quaintest and prettiest little villages I have ever seen. I have never been here before, and yet every part of it seems familiar to me. I never, as

far as I know, knew anybody who had ever visited it nor have I heard it described, but I seem to know all about it—I think I must have dreamed about it—I never saw such a place for bridges in my life ——"

"Yes," rejoined Ralph, "it might be called the Venice of the Thames. When I was staying in Venice, they told me there were over three hundred bridges crossing the various canals. Well, there must be a good many more in Ashton Keynes in proportion to the size of the place. Ashton bangs London for bridging the Thames, there's no doubt about that."

"True," answered Stillmere, "and there's probably no town but London that has so many houses on the banks of the Thames as this has."

The visitors' enthusiasm for this quaint little village was scarcely to be wondered at, and from the moment they entered the place through a curious passage beside the ancient mill, the freshness of the scene and the unsophisticated character of its inhabitants struck them especially. There was a well-to-do aspect pervading the place. The smallest houses, the tiniest cottages, had an air of

independent prosperity, which was emphasized by the clean, healthy children about the doors, the luxuriant, well-kept gardens, and the window-sills gay with flowers.

The wanderers were getting somewhat hungry, and the appetising savour of the mid-day meal at some of these houses sped them forward in search of luncheon. Otherwise, they would doubtless have found time to look at the old buildings behind the Moat, and wander in what might have formerly been the gardens of the Nunnery, stroll up the lime avenue and inspect the church of the Holy Cross. They did not fail, however, to take note of various ancient crosses, now somewhat dilapidated, but forming picturesque objects in the pleasant streets.

Often they paused in front of some of the bridges, while the Thames gurgled musically at their feet, and they gazed over the dwarf walls and low hedges at the flower-decked pleasaunces, the brilliant lawns, and the tree-shaded retreats behind them. There was one old-fashioned, low, rambling cottageous residence they noted especially. The garden adjoined a small orchard. There were one or two children up a tree, and there were

others racing and romping across the grass-plat, as their silvery, girlish laughter made a pleasant harmony with the babble of the brook. There was a broad, low verandah, rustic and rose-laden, at the side of the house, and they observed beneath it a white-clothed table set for an early dinner.

"What a good place to have luncheon, if we were only asked!" said Ralph, as they passed on.

"H'm, don't know so much about that," retorted his friend. "Hot roast leg of mutton, milky rice pudding, and babies drumming on the table ——"

"Well, I could stand the baby-drummers, for I feel certain the mutton would be excellent, the pudding would be a poem — and—and—I am terrifically hungry, and I begin to have grave doubts about the luncheon question."

Whilst they were talking they took a wrong turning and missed the White Hart altogether, and as they could discover no hostelry whatever, the luncheon question became not only doubtful but serious. They quietly strolled on, discussing what they should do, when they became conscious of light footsteps

pattering behind them. Guy had lapsed into one of his preoccupied moods and did not take any heed of this, but Ralph gave a glance behind and saw two bonny, short-petticoated damsels. One might have been thirteen and the other a year or so younger. The eldest had long fair hair and grey eyes; her sister had dark eyes and hair which was cropped short like a boy, and a bright colour. He presently heard the two children's voices in dispute. "I'm sure it is'nt!" said the first voice. "Well, I'm perfectly certain it is," said the second voice; whereupon the second voice broke into a little song, something about "Guy Fawkes, Guy; stick him in a pie," and Stillmere turned round sharply, and to his friend's surprise, said, as he was warmly greeted by two children,—

"Why, Lollops! Did you drop out of the skies? I recognised your old song at once! And Atchi, my child, where did you come from?"

"Knew I was right," answered the fair damsel, who was addressed as Lollops, "perfectly sure of it. Saw you looking over our garden wall when I was up in the apple-tree. Atchi said it wasn't, but I knew

better. Why, didn't you know? We have a house here for the summer. But, there, I forgot, we haven't seen you since you were —— I trust Miss, Miss — I forget her name—is well ——"

"Well, child, you can continue to forget her name, and try, as I am doing, to forget all about her."

The child, with that rare intuition that belongs to the smallest of womankind, seemed to grasp the situation at a glance. She shook back her lovely ripple of fair hair, she took Guy by the hand, and a sorrowful expression came into her sweet grey eyes, which was succeeded by a flash of indignation, a swing of the shoulders, and a pout of the lips, all of which meant terrible condemnation of the young lady whose name she could not recollect.

"But you must come in and see us. We're just going to have dinner. Father and mother have driven out to see some friends at Cirencester, and won't be back till late. Come and dine with us! We want some one to cut the beef," she added, laughing.

Both men accepted this invitation with great cordiality. Ralph was duly introduced, and

as he soon made friends with children, the whole party quickly turned round and went laughing and chattering back to the house. They saw two merry-looking faces peering round the gateway; these were followed by white pinafores, which in their turn disclosed short pink frocks, flashing frills, and sable-hosed legs as the pair made a rush on Guy and appeared to be genuinely delighted to see him.

"What, Old Reliable! What, Woodie!" said Guy, as the children bounded towards him. "Here we are again!"

Guy and Ralph were following the children in at the gate when their progress was barred by an enormous brindled St. Bernard, who blocked up the way altogether and gave a thunderous bark. Miss Lollops looked round and laughed.

"Come here, Monk," she said, taking him by the ear, "and be introduced. This is Mr. Stillmere—now shake a paw—and this is Mr. Claymer—now shake another paw. And they're both friends—good friends—so you must treat them well, do you hear?"

Monk poked his great black muzzle against his little mistress's hand and extended the same favour to Guy and Ralph, then gave a gape

of satisfaction and slouched off and lay down contented in the shade.

"What extraordinary names!" said Ralph to Guy, when the laughing lasses had gone indoors to get themselves ready for dinner. "Lollops, Atchi, Old Reliable, and Woodie! You don't mean to say they were ——"

"All christened so? Certainly not. They have a set of as pretty *prénoms* as you could desire, but they have been quite extinguished by their nicknames. They are all ——"

Here they were interrupted by the children trooping back again, and the eldest girl leading Guy to his seat on her right, she taking the head of the table.

"You sit here, Mr. Stillmere," said she, "because I want you to cut the beef. Mr. Claymer, take the other end, please, and keep those two rebels in order, if you can. It's only a cold dinner, I'm afraid. Roast beef, salad, gooseberry pie—and, oh, lots of cream —and bread and cheese, and heaps of strawberries ——"

"How unfortunate!" said Ralph, with a laugh, "when Stillmere can never take anything but hot roast mutton and milky rice pudding ——"

"Oh! I'm *so* sorry," said the little hostess, looking quite distressed. "If I had only known ——"

"Don't you believe him, child," said Guy; "he's only chaffing. Nothing I like better than cold roast beef ——"

"Dear me, and they haven't mixed the salad," she answered. "Could you ——"

"May it please your Most Gracious Lollopship, I'm fully employed in the beef-cutting line. Get Ralph to do something for his dinner. Making a salad is about the only thing he's up to."

Claymer set to work immediately, and the fun they had over that salad was something surprising. He had already made tremendous friends with Old Reliable and Woodie, and he sent them off on all sorts of expeditions in search of all kinds of ingredients. He uttered cabalistic words as he added the salt, he intoned a mysterious incantation when he poured in the oil, and then he stirred the bowl rapidly and sang to a popular air—

As I stir it round, it will be found, this salad is so nice,
If you'll take my advice, you'll taste it in a trice,
And all you Four will ask for more, and then you'll loudly
shout "Hooroar!"
For the Man who Made the Salad in the Garden!

The little girls screamed with delight, and made the occasional passers-by look over the wall to see the cause of such unusual merriment in the quiet little village. Those who, attracted by the merry laughter, paused and gazed into the garden, indeed saw a pretty picture. There was the white-clothed table, with its floral decorations, its blue mugs, and its two gleaming silver tankards, beneath the rose-laden verandah; there were the two sunburnt, handsome men, and the four laughing children in their pretty pink frocks, and in the foreground, keeping watch and ward over everything, was the majestic Monk, approving the proceedings with an air of solemn satisfaction.

Dinner at last being over, our two friends thought they would once more be on the tramp again. But they found some difficulty in making a start because they had to be shown round the garden, to visit the orchard, inspect the stable, and be introduced to the pony. Then they had to see some drawings that Lollops had made, and hear Old Reliable play on an ancient square piano, and subsequently improvise accompaniments to comic songs that the children insisted upon Claymer singing. At last Stillmere pulled out his watch,



"THERE WERE THE TWO SUNBURNT HANDSOME MEN, AND THE FOUR LAUGHING CHILDREN IN THEIR FRESH PINK FROCKS."

and said if they meant to reach Cricklade that evening they must start at once, and at the same time remarked that he was not quite sure of the road.

"You ought to go to Waterhay Bridge first," said their little hostess, "and then you can go along by the river. If you don't mind waiting a few minutes we'll show you the way."

So presently the whole six of them sallied forth, with Monk bounding on before and keeping a sharp look-out for his special enemy, the butcher's dog. They went down a pleasant road, passing over Oaklake Bridge, and pausing for a while at High Bridge. Here they made a slight *détour*, as the children wanted to show their friends Leigh Church, where they sometimes went on Sunday. It is a quaint, ancient structure, well worth a visit, and looks as if it had been dropped in the fields centuries ago, and had been forgotten ever since. A short stroll from the church brought them to Waterhay Bridge, and here our friends took leave of their little entertainers and once more followed the course of the river. Looking round at the bend, just before the bridge is lost to view, they saw the four children

standing on the railings, waving a farewell with their handkerchiefs and kissing their hands, while Monk said good-bye in one or two sonorous barks that re-echoed along the banks.

## CHAPTER FOURTH — *BY SEDGE AND STREAM*

*"When bored by* Bradshaw, *tired of train,*
*When sick of steam and railway;*
*To rest the body, clear the brain—*
*Try travelling by Snailway!"*

SNAIL SONGS.

"WELL," said Ralph, as they slowly strolled beside the stream, "they certainly are a lot of bonny children. So genuine, so simple, and so full of fun ——"

"Yes," answered Guy. "I've known them ever since they were babies, though I have not seen them for the last few months. I wouldn't have minded laying fifty to one we shouldn't know a soul in Ashton Keynes, but I not only meet with a lot of old friends, but we are gloriously entertained into the bargain. What with meeting Mrs. Torneywayne and her nieces in the morning and these children in the afternoon, we have had no chance of getting sick of one another's society yet ——"

"Ah! don't be too sure of that. When we get aboard of our canoe at Cricklade, I'll be bound we shan't meet anybody, and should it be a wet day to-morrow, there is a good chance of your taking the train from Lechlade and abandoning the expedition altogether. But it is strange meeting all these people in these out-of-the-way spots. After what has happened, shouldn't be at all surprised if Brill Gumplin, the prize bore of the Grampus Club, should suddenly pop out from behind that willow ——"

"Yes! Or we might find, when we reach the next turn of the stream, Glandimore Pobbles of the Ranunculus fishing for minnows and ready to fire off any one of those lengthy stories that we all of us know by heart ——"

"Well, whoever we may meet, we shall be sure to keep clear, as long as we stick to the banks, of your pet aversion, Mrs. Torneywayne's waggonette. And I must say that I like this quiet, casual, snail-like sauntering."

Neither Guy nor Ralph need have been apprehensive with regard to meeting either acquaintances or bores. They walked leisurely along the bank, and appeared to have the country pretty much to themselves. A little

above Waterhay Bridge the Thames has been joined by the Swill Brook, and one or two minor tributaries, and it now becomes a stream of not a little importance. The two explorers follow its course for a considerable distance till they reach the Ford, and then they take their way over Hailstone Hill, whence they get fine views of the surrounding country and pleasant peeps of the winding, glittering stream, and a superb sunset which argues well for the weather of to-morrow.

A pathway across the meadow cuts off a considerable angle and lands them in Hailstone Lane. Following this for some distance, they presently take another pathway over the fields which brings them out near to the Wilts and Berks Canal; eventually they strike the main road, and about half a mile further they reach Cricklade. They enter the town by a narrow street, previously leaving the vicarage, just beginning to show some lights in its lower windows, on the right, and the tower of Saint Sampson's on the left clearly defined against the celadon twilight sky.

It was a lovely evening, there was just a little breeze stirring. And the breeze was fragrant with the hayfields. Anon came the

scent of flowers from the adjacent gardens, and presently a savour of sedges from the river, and as they turned into the long, straggling High Street there was an unmistakable odour of broiled ham that was indescribably appetising. The odd gables, the quaint chimneys, and the irregular buildings looked doubly picturesque against the clear twilight. Women were standing at the doors gossiping and enjoying the cool atmosphere after the unusual heat of the day; men were smoking their pipes or wending their way to cosy tavern parlours where "village Hampdens" were settling the affairs of the nation.

A few belated haymakers were slowly strolling home from the meadows, and every now and then our friends were saluted with a gruff but courteous "Good-night." One or two shops were just showing a dim light, and a similar illumination in some of the dwelling-houses exhibited many a quaint interior for the inspection of the passers-by. As they proceeded the church clock solemnly boomed the hour of nine, and this was repeated in a variety of different keys by belated clocks in adjacent houses. The hour was again asserted with much emphasis and distinction by a clock,

evidently considering itself to be the only reliable authority in the village, just as they reached the White Hart. There was a singular air of rest and contentment pervading the whole place.

And this feeling was by no means diminished when they entered the hostelry. Thanks to the forethought of Stillmere they were expected. They found the dinner-table prepared in a comfortable, low-ceilinged, massive-beamed room, at the back of the house, whence they looked through latticed windows on the garden, and they discovered their luggage awaiting their arrival in two scrupulously neat little bedrooms. By the time they were ready for dinner it was ready for them, and their long day in the open air had given them a tremendous appetite. They felt quite at home directly they sat down. As Stillmere remarked, the room "composed well." And so it did.

The table was just sufficiently lighted, and the glitter of the old brass candlesticks, the gleam of the blue willow-pattern ware, the solemnity of the grandfather clock—that filled up all the pauses in the conversation with its strident ticks, and reflected the motionless

flames of the candles in its polished oaken case — the long, low window, with all the lattices open, the glimpse beyond the garden of glorious, still, summer night, with the stars winking and blinking in the firmament, made a picture alike agreeable to the eye and soothful to the mind. The dinner was good, plain, and wholesome. But few dishes, and all the best of their kind. The ale, too, was sound, beady, and bright, and those tall glasses were frequently replenished.

Subsequently long churchwarden clays were brought in, and the supreme feeling of rest and content became intensified as the azurine smoke-wreaths curled and floated about the candles and fluttered out of the window, and lost themselves in the clear blue night. The intense quiet was only broken by the occasional laughter of the "village Hampdens" in a distant room. At last there was a sound of the closing of windows and the barring of shutters and the shutting of doors. More and louder chatter of the "village Hampdens" as they wished one another good-night at the door and went tramping up the High Street. The neat little serving maid looks in and asks the travellers "if they would like anything else before the



"SUBSEQUENTLY LONG CHURCHWARDEN CLAYS WERE BROUGHT IN."

bar closes"; but they are both so sleepy that they take their candles and depart bedwards.

"Only eleven," said Stillmere, with a yawn, "and I can scarcely keep my eyes open."

"Yes, just the time they are beginning to drop into the Oleander," replied his friend, with a portentous gape. "Good-night, old man, and mind you don't dream you are run over by Mrs. Torneywayne's waggonette!"

Guy did not experience such a catastrophe in the visions of the night; but he dreamed that he was being chased along the banks of the Thames by a little sailor-hat with a saucy red ribbon that rolled rapidly after him with no visible motive power. He felt compelled to run away from it, and he awoke quite out of breath and very much frightened.

## CHAPTER FIFTH — *A SYREN IN A MACKINTOSH*

"*The clouds were black, the thunder rolled, umbrellas were in vain;*
*A syren in a mackintosh went singing through the rain!*"

THE WATERPROOF WARBLER.

NOTHWITHSTANDING a delay of a day or two at Cricklade on account of the non-arrival of their canoe, the voyagers started in good time on Saturday morning. It is true they had but to paddle less than a dozen miles to Lechlade, but they wished to take matters easily, and rest for a while wherever and whenever they felt disposed to do so. The luggage had all been sent on, and they took nothing in the way of cargo besides well-filled flasks and a few morning papers. One or two natives saw them off hard by Rose Cottage, and some chubby-cheeked, tow-haired children cheered them faintly as they shot under the plank-bridge. Claymer paddled and Stillmere lounged in the bow and cast his eye over the papers.

"I don't know what to say to the weather," said Ralph, looking up at the sky. "What does Miss Weatherwise say?"

"I am sorry to say," replied Guy, consulting the *Daily Graphic*, "Miss Weatherwise has her classic brolly out, and under the head of 'Midlands' I read, 'Some thunder. Sharp local showers.'"

"Ah! then, I wasn't so far wrong in bringing the mackintoshes after all."

After leaving Cricklade, the navigation of the river in a canoe is mighty pleasant. Not only does the stream widen, but it has increased in rapidity by the addition of the Churn and the Rey, which join it just above the bridge. It was indescribably soothful, gliding along between the tree-fringed banks and watching the changes perpetually wrought by the cloud shadows from time to time. The weather was much less sultry; there were ominous black clouds to be seen occasionally as the breeze freshened and made music amid the willows and the sedges. After passing beneath Eisey footbridge, they stepped the tiny mast and hoisted an enormous sail, which was Stillmere's especial design, they then both lighted pipes and sped away merrily before the breeze,

Claymer steering with his paddle and keeping a look-out.

"Saint Mary's Church, Eisey, may now be sighted over the port bow!" he shouted.

"I'll take your word for it, Ralph; if I turn round I shall upset the ship!"

"Yes, that you will; sit a bit more to your right, or I'm jiggered if we shan't have the whole concern over. We're carrying too much sail for this squally weather."

"No, no! It will be all right when we are clear of these willows."

And so it was. They had a steady breeze, and went along delightfully. The stream gurgled musically as the light craft flew over its waters. Occasionally the haymakers looked at them with open-mouthed surprise, and fancied they had seen a daylight ghost. Sleepy cows gazed at them more in sorrow than in anger; and indignant youngsters of the bovine order lowered their heads and whisked their tails as if they would like to have had a game of pitch-and-toss with the strange white-winged bird who dared to approach so closely to their domain. They nearly came to grief at Water Eaton footbridge, but, fortunately, lowered the sail just in time. Once clear of the bridge,

they hoisted it again and had a pleasant run—passing the picturesque mansion of Water Eaton Hall on the right—till they reached the cut about half a mile below.

Here they were not quite sure with regard to shoals and other impediments, so they lowered the sail, and Ralph paddled quietly. Presently they passed two copper-coloured haymakers sitting in the shade, taking their mid-day meal and paying attention to a comfortable little wooden keg. The men touched their hats, but shook their heads as if they could not quite comprehend what was going on.

"They seem astonished," said Stillmere. "Shouldn't wonder if this were the only canoe afloat between Cricklade and Inglesham."

"Daresay," replied Claymer.

They were just approaching a point with a tiny eyot on the left, behind which there runs a backwater of considerable depth and width.

"No, wrong for once," shouted Ralph, and suddenly putting his craft to the left. "There *is* a canoe! And, by Jove, nobody aboard of her! A prize! A derelict!"

And there was a canoe undoubtedly—evidently got adrift from somewhere—swinging

round and round in the stream with the painter hanging in the water. Guy looked round and saw the canoe. It was by no means a new one, and it had acquired that beautiful deep orange tone that looks so well in the water and seems to harmonize perfectly with the dull tones of the banks and the vivid hues of the waterside vegetation. A poppy-red sunshade was open, with its handle resting on the dark blue cushions, which had evidently caught the breeze and had been the means of wafting the light craft into the stream; a pair of long *Suède* gloves were on the cushion, and a shattered rose, a paper bag of jam puffs, and a volume of poems.

"Ah! I see what this is; a case of justifiable suicide through unbridled perusal of poems in the sunshine," said Stillmere.

"Nothing of the kind," replied Claymer. "No girl would commit suicide and leave such nice-looking jam puffs uneaten."

"How do you know the canoe belongs—or did belong—to a girl?"

"Easy enough. Sunshade, gloves, crushed rose, jam puffs, book of verses—all point in that direction. Besides," he added, laughing, "there are three hairpins on the cushion.



"SHE TURNED FROM HER WORK AND HELD HER PENCIL POISED IN
[illegible]"

Evidence absolutely conclusive. Owner of derelict—girl. At present perfectly well, but apprehensive of getting wet through, and probably to be discovered somewhere up this backwater. Nothing tragic to be apprehended, but must go on a voyage of discovery."

As they turned the canoe round and took the other in tow, they noticed the thunder clouds heavy and dark against the grey green of the willows, and felt a few rain drops beginning to fall. When reaching the termination of the backwater they noticed a girl sitting under the trees, busily engaged sketching. She was so absorbed in her occupation that she did not take any notice of their advent, nor seemed to be in any way disturbed at the approaching storm, and it was only when Ralph made a tremendous splashing and rustling among the reeds in landing that she looked round, and then she turned from her work, and held her pencil poised in the air as she looked inquiringly with a pair of forget-me-not eyes.

"Pardon me!" said Ralph to her, as he raised his hat. "But I think the canoe that we found drifting down below may possibly belong to you? And also, may I suggest that as there is evidently a sharp shower coming

on, it would be as well if you should take shelter somewhere?"

"Thank you so much," answered the girl, rising and gazing upon Stillmere and the two canoes, "it is mine—or rather Dick's—he always says girls don't know how to tie a boat up—and it really looks as if I didn't," she added, with a low ripple of a laugh. "How very good of you! Yes, it seems very like rain," and she looked at her watch. "I had no idea it was so late. I must try and get down to Castle Eaton before the storm comes on."

And she gathered all her sketching materials together, and walked with Claymer to the waterside. The rain by this time began falling, and Ralph insisted upon putting her into his long drab mackintosh, and packing her securely in her canoe. Just as she was about to start it was discovered that the paddle was nowhere to be found. They hunted for it everywhere without success, and then came to the conclusion that it must have been knocked over and gone down stream when the canoe drifted away. There was nothing for it but to offer to tow her down, which offer was cheerfully accepted.

The rain now came down steadily, and Stillmere could not help smiling at the little figure, under the red sunshade, fast becoming purple with the wet, with those forget-me-not eyes sparkling with fun and merriment between the huge upstanding collar of the waterproof. There was no doubt about the rain now. It increased in violence every minute. The two men could feel it rattling down on their backs, the river looked as if it were simmering, and the banks seemed to be in a mist. They paddled their fastest, and it did not take them long to run into shelter under Castle Eaton Bridge.

Here they landed, and the damsel was helped out of her canoe; she seemed in a desperate hurry to be off, and was trying to struggle out of her mackintosh.

"Don't take it off," said Ralph. "How far have you to go?" She said she had to walk about a mile and a-half.

"Then you'll be drowned if you don't wear it. You see we've got ours on, and it's a spare one we happened to have with us. If you wish to send it back," he added, seeing she looked doubtful and tried to unbutton the mackintosh. "'Ralph Claymer, New Inn,

Lechlade,' till Monday, after that 'Salter's, Oxford,' will find us."

The girl thanked them heartily, and flashing a merry twinkle from her forget-me-not eyes, went forth into the pouring rain, and departed singing to herself a merry little song. They watch the lissome figure in the long drab waterproof, further protected by the sunshade looking like a drowned poppy, till it became merged in the mist and hidden by intervening bushes.

"Well, that's an adventure anyhow," said Guy. "Upon my word I feel quite chilly. Where's that flask? The rain's slackening already, and we shall have a fine afternoon after all. A little more than a mile and a-half further will bring us to Kempsford, where we can have luncheon and get thoroughly dry. What a merry-looking girl! Wonder who she is, and where she lives?"

"Yes, and I wonder who 'Dick' was she talked about so much?"

It was still raining pretty sharply when they emerged from the shelter of the bridge, and though there is no vestige remaining of Lord Zouche's Eiton Castelle, whence the place takes its name, they caught a glimpse of the

Rectory gardens, the quaint village, Saint Mary's Church with its picturesque bell-tower and its graveyard almost reaching to the water. This, by the way, is the first church absolutely on the river bank, an example which is pretty extensively followed on the Thames from this point to Westminster Abbey. They observe, too, the river has here increased considerably in breadth, and a little distance below the church, at the Washpool, it turns abruptly to the left at almost a right angle and then runs nearly parallel with the Thames and Severn Canal, approaching it more closely as it gets nearer to Kempsford.

A little way beyond the sharp turn alluded to, the river enters its native Gloucestershire, and presently becomes the boundary between that county and Wiltshire for some distance beyond Lechlade. The richness of the pasturage both on the right hand and the left in the low, broad meadows, they could not help observing. Indeed, it is said this circumstance led to the institution of more abbeys and religious establishments than in any other two counties in England, and this gave rise to the proverb, "As sure as God's in Gloucestershire."

As they approach Kempsford—they have both been paddling with a will in waterproofs, and are getting tremendously hot—though they can hear the thunder growling in the distance occasionally, a gleam of sunshine may be seen on the graceful tower of Saint Mary's, and the rain has well-nigh stopped. A sharp bend to the right takes them past the gardens and plantations belonging to the village, and they presently land at the Manor Farm, haul their canoe out on the grass, cover it up, and leave it in charge of a native, who seems to think it the funniest thing that had ever happened.

Perhaps they do not have much fun in Kempsford, especially on a wet day, and doubtless the arrival of the canoe and its owners was an event in this good man's life, for when Guy and Ralph looked round they saw the Kempsford humorist—he could scarcely have been a New Humorist, for he must have been over eighty—walking round and round their craft and patting it as if it required soothing and he was afraid of it running away, then looking at it with great affection and admiration and exploding into a violent guffaw as he slapped his legs with excitement.

Kempsford is little else than a long street of about half a mile, extending from the church and across the canal bridge to the schools. It is of the quietest and most old-fashioned description, and still rejoices in stocks for the coercion of refractory inhabitants, which probably have not been used since Lord Coleraine — better known to most of us as Colonel Hanger—dismantled his fine old fourteenth-century mansion, sold the materials for what they would fetch, and cut down all the timber and converted it into cash.

In the centre of the village the travellers discovered a comfortable hostelry—the George —and a landlady who seemed to be fully alive to the necessity of immediately providing a luncheon. She at once had a fire lighted in a snug, low-ceilinged, dark-panelled room, and the crackle of the logs presently harmonized with the hissing of frying-pan in the kitchen, and the pungent odour of burnt wood mingled without discord with the savour of broiled ham, and by the time our friends had dried themselves before the fire they were able to do ample justice to a particularly enticing dish of eggs and ham, followed by a capital North Wiltshire cheese and the most delightful of

crusty loaves, accompanied by excellent ale out of big mugs. Luncheon finished, they took a hurried inspection of the church and remains of the castle, and betook themselves once more to their point of embarkation.

They found the ancient humorist still smiling at the canoe, and apparently talking to it as he shook his finger at it.

"Upon my word, our friend must be a sort of Shakespearean clown. Look at him," said Stillmere.

"Yes, I can fancy him saying," rejoined Claymer, "'If thou art a boat thou floatest, but if thou art a boat and floatest not, verily thou wilt sink and art no more worthy to be called a boat. Argal'—he will be sure to say argal—'the wise man stoppeth on dry land, while the fool risks his life in thy company. If it is so, it is not otherwise, and if otherwise, why should it be wherefore?'—and so on for about half an hour. This is what is called dry humour in a Shakespearean clown—it would be considered babbling idiotcy in any one else."

The Shakespearean clown, however, proved to be a man of business as well. He was mightily content with the tip he received,

and as the voyagers turned round to get a glimpse of the church, they saw him running off at the top of his speed, as Stillmere remarks, "hastening to The George to moisten his humour, which had become somewhat over-dry while he was waiting in the sunshine." For the sun had made its appearance while they were at luncheon, and it promised to be fine for the rest of the day. Stillmere paddled energetically, and Claymer showed a disposition to go to sleep. About half a mile below Kempsford the stream divides and joins again below Hannington Bridge, and they go pleasantly along, sometimes paddling, sometimes drifting, sometimes sailing, finding nothing especially noteworthy till they reach the spot where the Cole joins the Thames.

After this the stream again approaches closely to the canal, and they presently pass on their left the few houses that constitute Inglesham, with the ancient tiny church of Saint John the Baptist with its quaint bell-tower. A few more twists in the river bring them to Inglesham Round House, a picturesque structure which marks the junction of the river with the Thames and Severn Canal, and also the confluence of the Colne. It is well worth

while to pause just below the mouth of the Colne and look back, for the Round House, with the high-pitched wooden bridge crossing the Thames, the stone bridge marking the entrance to the canal, and the background of poplars form a most picturesque *ensemble*.

Not more than three-quarters of a mile further brings them to Lechlade Bridge. Here they leave their ship and quietly stroll up to the New Inn. The New Inn must not be thought to be a modern hostelry with smart London waiters and oppressively glittering tables with green and pink hock glasses. Nothing of the kind. It has certainly been the New Inn throughout the present century, and probably for long before its commencement. It is pleasantly situated in the picturesque market-place, hard by the church and the vicarage. One never seems to be quite certain whether it is an inn pretending to be a private house, or a private house playing at being an inn. Probably it comprised the advantages of both, for our friends found it mighty comfortable as they lingered over their dinner in the evening.

"It's been a real good day," said Ralph, as he lighted his post-prandial pipe.

"Yes," answered Guy, "despite the rain, we have really done very well. And now I think we need be under no apprehension with regard to the waggonette party. I feel now we are quite clear of them, and shall be able to get along comfortably and enjoy ourselves in our own way."

## CHAPTER SIXTH — *A MEMORABLE SUNDAY*

*"'Tis woman's right to change her mind,*
*And change it often too:*
*In ringing changes you will find*
*She'll oft change yours for you."*

THE MIND-MENDER.

THE most trifling incidents change the current of a life, and the smallest events are sufficient to alter history altogether. The question whether a man walks down one side of the street or the other would seem to be of no importance, but it has often been found that the right-hand side has led to ruin, whereas the left might have been found to be the road to prosperity. If, this Sunday morning after breakfast at the New Inn, the laziness of Ralph had triumphed over the energy of Guy, this story would probably never have been written.

Ralph was in favour of lounging by the river, or, at most, attending service at Saint Laurence's close by, but Guy was wondrously

energetic, and insisted upon starting early and going to the ancient church of Saint John the Baptist, Inglesham; and when Guy made up his mind to anything—which he did not often take the trouble to do—his influence over others was considerable. The consequence was that the pair found themselves walking along the Inglesham road, and subsequently seated in an ancient oaken pew in the quaint little church long before the majority of the congregation had arrived.

They were mightily pleased with the simplicity of the interior. Those who have the care of it have, up to the present time, had the common sense and the good taste to leave it alone. The ancient pews, the carved woodwork, and the primitive beauty of the old building are untouched, and, thank goodness, the hand of the modern restorer—who has probably done even more damage than ever was wrought by the iconoclastic soldiery of a sanctimonious regicide—with his abominable and uncomfortable pale oak benches, his flashy brasswork, his staring coloured tiles, and his garish stained-glass windows, is nowhere visible. There was an indescribably soothful feeling about the place as they sat there and

listened to the querulous clang from the quaint bell-tower overhead, and caught glimpses of the blue sky and the bright green leaves, the brilliant sunshine and the pleasant fields, through the narrow windows from time to time.

There was not a large congregation, which was probably just as well. If there had been, a great many would have had to be content with a seat in the graveyard outside. Just before the service commenced, our friends were conscious of a sort of sensation within the building. Some of the ancient men looked round in wonderment, and the old lady who officiated as pew-opener seemed to be considerably perturbed. "Ah!" thought Ralph to himself, as the party settled themselves in the background, "the Squire and family, I daresay. Squire Inglesham, what a good name for a novel, or the Marquis of Inglesham, eldest son of the Duke of Lechlade. We must be on our best behaviour."

Guy was equally interested in the new-comers, but they were seated so immediately behind, that it was impossible to see them without turning round in a pointed manner. In the hymn just before the sermon, however,



"GUY DROPPED HIS HYMN-BOOK."

he was struck with the thrilling sweetness of a girl's voice. It seemed to pervade the place with its plaintive tenderness and its fascinating beauty of tone. It made the ancient fossilized agriculturists look up, and caused the pew-opener to gaze around with an air of wonder. Guy dropped his hymn-book, and, in picking it up, gave a furtive look behind him, and saw at a glance Mrs. Torneywayne and her two nieces and a smart, active-looking man with closely-cropped white hair and a white moustache, in whom he recognised Colonel Torneywayne. Ralph saw a sudden change come over his friend's countenance, and ventured to turn round for a moment, and when he saw who the Squire and his family were, he could not help smiling.

Stillmere, after the first flush of surprise, which was even apparent in his mahogany-tinted countenance, assumed a stolid expression, and remained well-nigh as rigid as a statue throughout the remainder of the service. He was somewhat sorry he had not fallen in with his friend's views, and was not a little vexed at what he had brought about by what he now considered to be his absurd energy. His vexation, his bad temper, or whatever it might

have been, soon vanished when the whole party met outside the church. It was impossible to withstand the genial manner and the considerate courtesy of Colonel Torneywayne.

Though he was over fifty and his hair was white, he was lithe, muscular, and active; his figure was slim, he was young in thought, he had excellent spirits, he had all the sense of enjoyment and appreciation of fun of a boy, and had a hearty, ringing, infectious laugh that was absolutely a public benefit. He was a man who made many friends and kept them; he was a man who made few enemies, but those who were his enemies remained so. He was a great favourite with young people, he had been everywhere and seen everything, and he knew pretty well every inch of the Thames from his boyhood. Stillmere, despite his being somewhat annoyed at having to meet Mrs. Torneywayne and her nieces again, took to the Colonel at once, and as they strolled back towards Lechlade, the latter explained that they were staying with some friends at Buscot, and they had driven over for the purpose of seeing Inglesham church, and left their waggonette at the New Inn.

Then further talk ensued about the river and their trip, and the Colonel said he was in somewhat of a fix, that he had a randan down at the wharf in which he meant to have gone as far as New Bridge on the following day and driven thence to Oxford. Two friends of his had engaged to form part of the crew, but he had only that morning heard that they were prevented coming; the coachman Weatherbrow had been taken ill and had to go home, so what with the boat and the trap he was in a considerable fix. Then the conversation turned to the expedition of the canoers, and where they meant to get to. Stillmere said they had no especially arranged plans, and they were in no particular hurry, but they had certainly thought of going off on the Monday morning.

"Well now, Mr. Stillmere, I think a good idea strikes me. How would it suit you and Claymer to row my boat down to New Bridge to-morrow, and take charge of Mrs. Torneywayne and one of the girls? The other might accompany me in the waggonette; we'll meet you at New Bridge, and all drive to Oxford in the afternoon. How would that do? If that would fall in with your views,

I should not only be greatly obliged but extremely delighted."

Guy found himself saying—and at the same time being very much surprised at himself—that he thought it would be a very excellent arrangement, and, provided Claymer agreed to the proposition—as, no doubt, he would—it would give him very great pleasure to fall in with it. They turned round to consult him, but they found they had been walking very fast, and left the rest of the party a long way behind, so they paused and waited for them to come up. As they approached, chattering and laughing, the Colonel said to his wife—

"Look here, Child! I believe, through the kindness of Mr. Stillmere, I've found my way out of the difficulty. He has undertaken to help us down with the boat to-morrow, provided Ralph Claymer consents; so I charge you to bring all your fascinations to bear upon that somewhat obstinate young man and make him help to carry out this excellent arrangement.'

"Now, I am sure you will help us, Mr. Claymer," said Mrs. Torneywayne, with the most pleading expression in her pretty brown

eyes. "Pray don't let any previous engagements interfere with such a nice impromptu party. I love impromptu parties, but I hate previous engagements; they always spoil everything!"

Ralph looked at Guy, fully expecting to hear him say nothing would give him greater pleasure, but that he found he was compelled to go to town on the following morning; he then looked at Miss Dora Daynflete, and saw a flicker of encouragement hovering about her eyes, and replied he should be delighted if he could be of any service to Mrs. Torneywayne. Guy, who by that time was laughing merrily about the hat episode with Miss Phyllis Feyton, thereupon chimed in, to Ralph's intense surprise, and said it really was an excellent idea, and it was indeed good of Mrs. Torneywayne to take pity on two distressed wanderers who were already beginning to be sick of one another's society.

They all strolled back to the inn together, and Guy asked them to luncheon. They were, however, bound to return to Buscot; but they came in and sat in the hall, while the horses were being put to, and the Colonel had a pint of ale, which he seemed to relish

mightily. The details of the expedition were soon fixed, and it was arranged that all luggage was to be sent on by rail to Oxford, and that the start was to take place at half-past ten on the following morning.

## CHAPTER SEVENTH — *AN HARMONIOUS QUARTETTE*

*"Then ho! for the flow of the River,*
*And hey! for the humming of bees;*
*The spot where forget-me-nots quiver*
*To exquisite music of trees."*

THE PANGBOURNE PILGRIM.

VERY early the following day were Stillmere and Claymer down at the wharf getting the boat in order. They found the *Otter* just what the Colonel had described her—a light boat to pull, but by no means crank, and a very comfortable one to travel in—one in which you could lounge at ease, and one which would cause you no anxiety whatever, if it got considerably out of trim. There were plenty of comfortable cushions, and the craft would easily accommodate six—that is to say, one man at the sculls, two at the oars, and three passengers. As they would only be a party of four to New Bridge, they had ample accommodation.

It was but a little past ten when the

waggonette arrived, driven by the Colonel, containing his wife and Miss Daynflete. Guy felt somewhat disappointed at this, but, thought he, what does it matter? When we reach Oxford we shall part, and there will be an end of it. There had been a good deal of consultation as to which of the girls should go, and at last it was decided it should be Dora, as she had never seen this part of the Thames before.

It did not take them long to start. Mrs. Torneywayne, who knew the river well, undertook to steer, and Dora sat beside her. Guy pulled stroke and Ralph bow, while the sculls were for the present left in abeyance. There was a mast and sail ready to be rigged in case they should have a fair wind.

"Well, good-bye," said the Colonel, as he unfastened the painter, "and *bon voyage*. You're off in splendid time. It's hardly the half-hour yet. You ought to reach New Bridge without flurrying yourselves by about half-past two. At any rate we will be there waiting for you by that time.

"How well she travels," said Guy, "and a good steady pull is a delightful change after paddling."



"'WELL, GOODBYE,' SAID THE COLONEL."

It was true enough the boat went along splendidly. It did not take them long to reach Saint John's, which is the first lock on the Thames, and pass through it into the singularly curly stream beyond. In places it here curves so much that you appear to be constantly returning to the point whence you started. It requires no little skill in steering in these waters, for in places the stream is very swift, and you have to anticipate the sudden turnings before you reach them. Mrs. Torneywayne, however, proved to be an admirable pilot. A little way after passing Saint John's Lock, the stream altogether quits the county of its birth, Gloucestershire, and henceforth becomes the boundary between Oxfordshire and Berkshire. It was not much after eleven when they reached Buscot Lock. Departing thence, they traverse another winding bit of stream, and presently have a fine view of Buscot Park, Taylor's Hill, and other wooded slopes on the right.

Then, after successfully overcoming the perils of Hart's Weir, they behold Kelmscott on the left bank, with its picturesque manor house. After that, there is Eaton Hastings, a tiny village some distance from the opposite bank,

but the church of Saint Michael's and the Rectory, close to the stream, will scarcely escape observation. The high ground about Faringdon now pleasantly varies the scene, and you find Faringdon Hill continually appearing at unexpected places as the stream turns in various directions. Under ancient and picturesque Radcot Bridge they pass, and then Dora says suddenly—

"Auntie, I'm going to row. May I?"

"I suppose if I said 'No' you would row all the same!"

"But I know you wouldn't. Mr. Stillmere, *do* let me take your place, and come and talk to Auntie. Come and give her all the historical associations of the places we pass. *Do* tell her all about the fight ever so many hundred years ago on Radcot Bridge. *Do* improve our minds as we go along. If you'll be a sort of aquatic Mr. Barlow we shall be *so* grateful!"

"I'm afraid," answered Stillmere, with a laugh, as he rested on his oar and the boat drifted quietly on, "if I became an aquatic Mr. Barlow, I should be speedily marooned on the nearest eyot. I don't think I should have quite such an attentive audience as

Tommy and Harry were to the original. You see those unfortunate youths were compelled to listen, they were obliged to have their minds improved whether they would or not."

"Yes, poor boys," said Dora, "I wonder they didn't wait till they grew up and give old Barlow a good thrashing. But I may row, Mr. Stillmere, mayn't I?"

The change was quickly made, Guy altered the stretcher, and Dora soon showed them that she was no novice in a boat, and took them along at a pretty good pace past the Sharney Brook on the left till they reached Old Man's footbridge, which marks the site of Harper's Weir. Here another brook may be noticed called the Burroway. Both these streamlets, after various meanderings, eventually join, and subsequently constitute the Great Brook, which enters the Thames again in the neighbourhood of Shifford some four or five miles below.

"There's no occasion to hurry, Dora," said Mrs. Torneywayne, "you'll only make yourself hot, and we've plenty of time."

"Glad you spoke, Mrs. Torneywayne," said Ralph, "that short, sharp stroke was beginning to tell on me!"

"Well then, 'Easy all!'" shouted Dora, with a laugh and looking round at Ralph; "you're very soon tired."

"Oh, no," answered Ralph, "but we're not rowing a match, and I like to look at the prospect."

And as he gazed upon that child-like face, with its pretty eyes, capable of every kind of expression, with its red lips, with their endless variety of curves, with its bewitching dimples playing at hide and seek in the sunshine, with its closely coiffed wealth of fair hair, with its coquettish sailor-hat, with the white ribbon, as he looked upon that lissome girlish figure, the shapely shoulders, and the graceful lines—he thought the prospect was very fair indeed. And he furthermore went on to remark—

"You know, Miss Daynflete, if we go tearing along at such a pace we might just as well be on a railway, and have no opportunity to see the beauties of the banks. Now," he added, with mock gravity, "we had a glimpse of Faringdon Hill just now, and if you hadn't been in such a hurry I might have told you that Pye, the poet, once lived at Faringdon —"

"What!" she exclaimed, "are you also a Mr. Barlow? Auntie—Auntie," she shouted,

as she clapped her hands. "Another Mr. Barlow! Just fancy a boatful of Barlows! Our minds will be so improved by the time we reach New Bridge that uncle won't know us. I tell you what, Mr. Claymer, you're trying to deceive a poor ignorant girl. I don't believe there ever was such a person as Pye the poet."

"Go on rowing, you baby, and don't talk such nonsense," replied her aunt, who was having a quiet chat with Stillmere. She had just remembered that she had at one time heard rumours of his love affair, and, like all women, had great sympathy with misfortune of this description.

After proceeding for some distance along a winding and not very interesting portion of the stream, they reached Rushy Lock. Here they pause and leave the boat for a few moments to enjoy the prospect of the picturesque weir, which is certainly one of the most attractive portions of what may be called the Uppermost Thames. Dora at once decided that she would like to have the lock-keeper's house for her very own and live there for ever and ever. The whole scene was so pleasant, the sunshine was so bright, the air

was so pure and soft, the spot was so secluded, that it occurred to Ralph that the post of lock-keeper at Rushy was an enviable one, and if he could marry Dora and live happily there for ever afterwards it would be a paradise.

He had, however, thought the same thing with regard to various forms of existence and sundry young ladies before, that the idea scarcely gave a serious tone to his thoughts. It was an occasion when you thoroughly enjoyed the golden minutes which passed so rapidly, and had no consideration for the leaden years that might drag wearily in the future. At any rate, the scene at Rushy Weir and the music of its waters on that lovely day in June formed a picture and a melody that some of that light-hearted party would never forget.

Mrs. Torneywayne was obliged to bustle her party off at last pretty briskly, or "the young people," as she termed them, would have stopped there all day. Having a fair wind below Rushy, Guy got the mast and sail up, and they progressed easily and rapidly. As they wound about, the graceful spire of Bampton was continually appearing in

unexpected places. Presently they drift under the somewhat severe-looking stone arch of Tadpole Bridge, and in a little while they note on the right the wooded heights of Buckland, which form a pleasant change from the flat country they have hitherto passed through. Dora and Ralph were getting very friendly, though she still thought he was deceiving her about Pye the poet.

"Well, but what did he write?" she asked him.

"Well, well," answered Ralph, with considerable misgiving, "all sorts of things."

"I don't believe you ever read anything he wrote. Was he a minor poet?"

"Yes, a very minor poet, I should say," cut in Guy, with a laugh.

"Then I'm sure I shouldn't like him," said Dora. "There was a flabby-looking, unhealthy person staying at the Dappletons', whom they said was a minor poet, who did nothing but recite his own poems and talk about himself."

"Possibly," said Ralph, "that was his only chance of publication and notoriety. But I never heard that Pye was quite so bad as that."

"Talking about Pye the poet reminds me

of our pie and it's time we had luncheon," said Mrs. Torneywayne.

"Auntie, auntie," exclaimed Dora, "don't make game of serious subjects!"

"It's beefsteak, not game," retorted her aunt, as her eyes gleamed with merriment, and then she suddenly looked serious, and added, "Dora, we've left the luncheon basket behind!"

And so they had. There was a small basket containing cakes, and strawberries gathered that morning at Buscot, but the hamper of substantial fare, containing the pie, the hard-boiled eggs, the bottles of hock, and other tempting items, was nowhere to be found. Every one recollected seeing it on the wharf, and every one remembered it being moved and something being done with it, but they explored the boat thoroughly, and not a vestige of it or, what was more important, of its contents was to be found.

"Tell you what, Auntie, I believe it was all contrived by that wicked uncle of ours. He hid the basket, and now, at this very moment, he and Phyllis are having a private picnic in some secluded spot, and are eating, absolutely gorging themselves with the good

things that ought to have fallen to our share. It's positively disgraceful!"

There was, however, nothing to be done. The strawberries proved to be excellent, and the cakes were by no means unacceptable to the hungry crew. Stillmere had taken the precaution to put some soda-water in the locker, and both he and his friend had their flasks with them. And so the whole party fared pretty well, for it must be borne in mind there was no prospect of anything approaching an inn till they arrived at New Bridge, while the possibility of getting luncheon even there was very remote. Luckily, every one was not occupied with the strawberries, for Guy happened to be looking ahead as they rounded a point, and shouted—

"Hullo! Look out! Bridge ahead!"

Ralph had but a couple of seconds to get the sail down and unship the mast so as to clear picturesque Ten-foot Bridge.

"Only just in time," said Guy, who was steering, and hardly managed to clear an awkward projecting timber, as they swiftly passed through; "as near a shipwreck as possible. You people in the fok'sle are nice ones to keep a look out."

"It's all Dora's fault," said Mrs. Torneywayne; "she was chattering with the look-out man and distracting his attention."

"Oh, Auntie, how dare you talk in that way when you've been so interfering with the pilot that his steering has been absolutely shocking. First one bank and then the other. Coming down, you ought always to keep in the middle of the stream. Don't you know it is expressly forbidden to talk to the man at the wheel? If this occurs again," she added with mock gravity, "we shall have to put you in irons for the rest of the voyage."

"You'd better be very careful, Miss, or you'll be mast-headed," replied her aunt, as she threatened her with a sunshade.

"And then I shall be 'that sweet little cherub who sits up aloft, and keeps watch on the life of poor ——'" Then the little coquette looked at Guy, then gazed at Ralph a thought longer, then turned her pretty eyes full on Mrs. Torneywayne. "Poor Auntie, to be sure," and then broke into a merry laugh, in which they all joined.

From Ten-foot Bridge the stream takes a northerly direction through a somewhat uninteresting and swampy district, past a cluster

of houses which constitute the hamlet of Chimney; thence the river winds southward to Duxford Ferry, and again takes a turn due north till it reaches Shifford.

"As we are a sort of Mutual Improvement Society," said Guy—

"Always thought Mutual Improvement Societies were associations of people who knew nothing, and met together to teach it to one another," cut in Ralph.

"I am not to be put down by the voice of the scoffer!——"

"Good old Barlow!" exclaimed Dora.

"Dora! Dora!" half whispered her aunt, shaking her head, and looking serious.

"As we are a Mutual Improvement Society," asserted Guy once more, "I am sure Miss Daynflete will be glad to learn that in that field on the left was held one of the first Parliaments in Great Britain. Er—r—rum," added he, clearing his throat in pompous fashion. "Here, considerably over a thousand years ago, my young friends will be interested in learning, in the adjacent meadow were assembled, 'many Thanes, many Bishops, and many learned men, wise Earls, and awful Knights. There was Earl Elfrick, very

learned in the law, and Alfred—England's herdsman, England's darling.' I am sure my young friends will view this historic field with enthusiasm, and like to pause at Shifford for awhile."

"This place the cradle of English Parliament!" said Dora, with a laugh, "then let us get on as quickly as possible. Let us flee from Shifford, where the greatest nuisance in the world was invented—an invention that renders our newspapers all absolutely unreadable during the session. I never thought much of Alfred. Silly man, he burnt his ships—I mean his cakes—instead of eating 'em, and I think less of him than ever now."

The river after they have passed Shifford becomes prettier. Below Samson's Ford it widens out considerably, and the banks become more picturesque, and the trees and plantations more frequent. Passing the eyot on the left, Stillmere proposed that they should bring the boat in in a proper manner, so he took the sculls, Dora pulled stroke and Claymer bow, and Miss Daynflete gave them the short sharp stroke, of which Ralph had previously complained. "*Now* she moves," said Guy, as they swung along merrily.



"THE 'OTTER' WAS BROUGHT UP TO THE LANDING-PLACE IN MOST EXCELLENT STYLE."

They passed the site of Langley Weir and the eyot in good, steady, finished style, and presently, noticing Harrowden Hill on the right and the mouth of the Windrush on the left, they rounded the corner, and came in sight of that most picturesque and most ancient of all the Thames bridges, New Bridge. Mrs. Torneywayne held up her right hand and waved it, her face was wreathed with smiles and her brown eyes glistened with delight.

"Pull your best, Dora," said she. "Uncle Jack's on the bridge."

Then Dora bit her lips, and gave a defiant little toss with her head and quickened her stroke, and the *Otter* was brought up to the landing-place hard by the Maybush in most finished style.

"Well pulled, all!" shouted the Colonel from the bridge, and then he and Miss Feyton came round to assist them to land.

"You're in capital time. It has only just gone three. Have you had a good time, Child?" said he, turning to his wife.

"Oh, splendid, Jack," said she, "but we're all as hungry as hunters!"

## CHAPTER EIGHTH — *ON THE ROAD*

*"On a bike we may fume, on a horse we may fret,*
*But there's nothing but ease in our own waggonette!"*

DRIVING DITTIES.

THE Colonel laughed heartily when he heard all about the lost luncheon basket, and as he and his niece had had a most excellent repast at that comfortable hostelry, the Crown at Faringdon, the laugh was all on his own side.

"I declare you're too bad altogether, Jack," said his wife, at the same time re-echoing the Colonel's laugh, which was irresistibly infectious, "We poor people have been toiling hard all day on a few crumbs of cake and a strawberry or two, and you haughty and imperious 'carriage folk' have been faring sumptuously at Faringdon. Now don't shake your head, Jack, and pretend you only had a glass of sherry and a crust. I know that Phyllis, for one, would take care to have a good luncheon. Can't they do anything for us at the Maybush here? I'm famished!"

On inquiry, the landlady, who was extremely polite and sympathetic, said she was very sorry she had not known earlier and she would have provided amply, but they had had a lot of people in and there was very little left now. If they would not mind waiting an hour, she could send down to Kingston Bagpuze. This, however, they found to be out of the question.

Then Phyllis went out and interviewed the landlady, and, with that singularly gracious and sympathetic manner that she ever employed when speaking to any one inferior to herself in station, soon ingratiated herself and discovered that there was plenty of fresh butter and new-laid eggs in the house. After a little while she managed to get into the kitchen, which was a scrupulously clean, well-ordered room, with a low ceiling with big massive beams, and an old-fashioned chimney corner with a clear, bright fire burning.

"I have it," said Phyllis. "You've plenty of eggs, let's have an omelette!"

"Lor, miss," replied the landlady, "who's to make it?"

"Why, I will—if I may——"

"*You* make it? Why, bless your heart,

dearie, you shall if you like. But you'll black your hands, and spoil your nice dress, and burn your pretty face, and——"

"You'll let me do it? It *is* good of you!"

And Phyllis began at once. She found everything was scrupulously clean and in first-rate order, she bustled about, made all her preparations "just as if she'd been a cook all her life in a real gentleman's family," as the landlady said when she was giving the history of the affair afterwards. She then asked the landlady to go in and lay the cloth and say luncheon would be ready in ten minutes.

A mighty pretty picture did the damsel make, so brilliant did she look in the ancient sombre kitchen, with her grey-blue gingham frock, close-fitting, and subtly hinting at the lines and undulations of her trim figure, with a white apron belonging to the landlady on, and her sleeves furled high and showing her pretty arms as she anxiously bent over the fire and watched the progress of her cooking. Meantime the Colonel had explored the recesses of the "cellar"—a special locker which he had had constructed in the marvellous waggonette—and discovered a couple of bottles of hock, some seltzer, and a big glass jug. With these

materials he managed to compound a very fair hock cup.

Presently they sat down, and the omelette was put on the table by the landlady with considerable pride. It was pronounced to be most delicate in flavour and as light as thistledown, and, with an accompaniment of excellent bread and butter, the famished voyagers made a capital meal. When the fair cook presently entered, looking a little fire-flushed, but very charming, she was received with acclamation.

"Phyllis, my dear, you're an angel!" exclaimed her aunt.

"Phyllis, my love," said her uncle, "what a wife you'd make for a working man!" And then he began to sing—

Phyllis is my only joy,
Sometimes loving, sometimes coy.
When she *soufflées* makes like these,
She can never fail to please!

All this lunching caused them to tarry at New Bridge longer than they intended, and it was four o'clock before they had bidden good-bye to the landlady and were progressing briskly in the direction of Kingston Bagpuze. The Colonel was driving, with his wife beside him,

and the rest of the company were chattering away merrily as they were whirled through the pleasant country lanes. Ralph was glad to see his friend's spirits were improving, that his cynical humour was considerably modified, and his fits of solemnity and pre-occupation less frequent than at the commencement of the expedition. As for Ralph himself, he was enjoying himself prodigiously, only regretting that the delightful variation of their tour would probably come to an end in an hour's time.

It is a most enjoyable drive from New Bridge to Oxford. After going south as far as Kingston Bagpuze, our friends took the road to the left, passing through Fyfield, and then, leaving Tubney House on their right, passed between Tubney Wood and Whitehart Wood, and so to Besilsleigh. This road almost follows the windings of the Thames, at a distance of about a mile and a-half from the bank, till Cumnor is reached. Here the Colonel pulled up and, pointing down a road to the left, said—

"There. If you boating people had not been so lazy and so hungry you might have pulled down as far as Bablock Hythe Ferry and saved us no end of time ——"

"You bad uncle—you're worse than the Wicked Uncle in 'The Babes in the Wood'"—said Dora; "you would have found us all starved and exhausted by that time, and the robins beginning to cover up the Babes in the Boat with leaves. You're very nearly as bad as Anthony Forster, and the Bablock Hythe tragedy—what a good title for a story, 'The Babes of Bablock Hythe!'—would become as notorious as the Cumnor Hall murder!"

"Well, as for the latter, I believe it to be a pure invention of the novelist. Yes, of course it is! Don't I remember seeing 'Kenilworth' in the days of my youth at the Strand Theatre, when Amy Robsart was played by a charming young lady, with whom I fell desperately in love, one Miss Patty Oliver? Cannot I recall how she sang to Varney—

Go away, ugly man, don't you come anigh me,
I'll tear you, I'll scratch you—only just try me!

I recollect, too, she subsequently stabbed Varney, and it was reported she was killed, but just before the curtain came down she was carried in by Wayland Smith, who said, in reply to the report that she had fallen through a trap—

'Tis false! She's saved—saved for the last grand scene.
Her feet went through, but not her crinoline!

Of course Walter Scott was wrong in his facts."

"Jack! be quiet," said his wife. "You're quite horrid not to believe in 'Kenilworth.' Besides, if we hadn't stopped at New Bridge you would never have found out Phyllis's skill. You yourself said that omelette was a poem ——"

"So it was, Child," he answered. "'Phyllis is my only joy.' I must treat her henceforth with the most profound respect, and from this day I become a most sincere Phyllistine until further notice. If we ever get as far as the House-boat, I will make Phyllis *chef* at an enormous salary. If any one likes to have a drink at the Bear and Ragged Staff, or see Anthony Forster's tomb in the church, or the few doubtful remaining stones of Cumnor Hall, he can No one? Quite right! Too hot to-day for enthusiasm or doubtful historical research, so on we goes to Oxford."

"I declare it's too bad," said Phyllis, with a pout, and she pouted very prettily, "Uncle Jack, for you to try to knock all the romance out of my favourite 'Kenilworth.' Isn't it disgraceful, Mr. Stillmere? Isn't it far more likely Sir Walter Scott would be right than

Uncle Jack. Now I shall expect you to take my part, Mr. Stillmere."

Guy replied he was quite certain that Sir Walter would be in a better position to judge of the real state of affairs than the Colonel, because it was his business to find out the facts of the case. Indeed, if Phyllis had advanced the startling proposition that Thackeray's novels were written by Dickens, there is but little doubt that Guy would have warmly supported her. The Colonel laughed loudly at his niece's discomfiture.

"Uncle, I won't cook for you any more. I *hate* you. *There!*—for trying to make me dissatisfied with my favourite novelist."

"It's refreshing to know any one who reads Scott nowadays," said Stillmere, "and to find any one so enthusiastic in his defence."

"Well, you know," replied Phyllis, dropping her voice in a pretty little confidential manner that seemed delightful to the infatuated Stillmere, "I don't read them all. Some of the very Scotchiest ones I can*not* stand. I'm very sorry, for I believe they're his best. Why can't I get on with them? Why? Because I don't understand the language. Oh! yes, I can read French as well as I can English, but

it is impossible for me to comprehend Scotch. They didn't teach Scotch at our school—did they, Auntie?

"No, of course they didn't," said Mrs. Torneywayne.

"Well, I think it was a pity," continued her niece, "for there are lots of lovely Scotch stories I can't read because my education was so neglected. Why don't they have English translations of these? I think Robert Burns the very dullest poet I ever read. You can't enjoy a poem when you have to refer to foot-notes every other word to see what it means. Read William Black? Yes, I should think I had! I take the keenest delight in his stories, because an ignorant creature like myself can read them without a dictionary."

"What a long speech, Phyl," said Dora, who had been unusually silent since they left Cumnor. "You ought to write a paper in some learned magazine and call it 'Scotching the Young Idea.' It appears to me we have all sorts of benefits from Scotland—Butter-Scotch, Scotch tartans ——"

"Scotch ale!" suggested Ralph.

"S—sh!" said Dora, shaking her head. "Scotch shortbread, Scotch scones ——"

"Scotch whisky!" ventured the Colonel, turning round.

"Be quiet, Uncle!" exclaimed Dora. "Scotch marmalade, Scotch reels, Scotch bagpipes—which I shall have to learn, because I understand they're likely to supplant the banjo ——"

"Fancy the Bagpipe in the Boudoir!" said Guy.

"Don't interrupt—Mr. Stillmere, I was going to say all these nice things from Scotland we thoroughly appreciate and understand, except the language. And I believe we can never thoroughly comprehend those good people and their literature till we learn their language. When we get to Oxford I will see if I can find some learned professor who will give me lessons."

"If you look about you, Dora, you chattering baby," said her aunt, "instead of talking non-sense, you'll get a very good view of Oxford presently."

They had just reached the spot where the road bears away on the left to Eynsham, and looking back to the left they had a fine view of Wytham Woods, behind the Abbey. Close to the Abbey is the church which was rebuilt

more than eighty years ago from the stones which at one time constituted Cumnor Hall. Presently they pass through Botley, enter Oxfordshire, and are once more in the valley of the Thames, looking on the left towards Binsey and the Port Meadow. All this time they have been enjoying a superb prospect of the towers and buildings of Oxford from various points of view.

It was a good deal later than they intended, the sun was getting low, and the varied architecture of the place was exhibited to unusual advantage. They passed along the Seven Bridge Road, and, crossing the Thames, entered the grand old city as the clocks were chiming the hour of seven.

CHAPTER NINTH

# *EASY ALL!*

> "*On board the Steamer of Salter, down stream are you lazily steaming—*
> *With bright panorama in view, in fine summer weather you're dreaming!*
> *You have nought in the world now to do, and feel you're quite equal to do it;*
> *The day is before you, and you are doing your best to get through it.*"
>
> IDLE IDYLLS.

"YOU know, for really seeing the Thames Valley and absolutely appreciating the beauties of its scenery, there is nothing like one of Salter's steamers," said the Colonel.

The Colonel and his party had been staying with some friends in Oxford, and Guy and Ralph had been sojourning at a hotel. The pleasant acquaintance inaugurated on the Uppermost Thames had considerably developed during their stay in the city, and so it came to pass they had met according to agreement on board the *Clieveden*, and that comfortable craft was just about to start on its down stream trip.

"Yes, you have the same advantage here as

driving in the country gives you over walking," said Stillmere. "If you're walking, you can't see over the hedges; if you're rowing, you can't see over the banks."

"Exactly," answered the Colonel. "I knew an enthusiastic oarsman who spent his life in rowing between Richmond and Oxford, and who boasted that he knew every rush and ripple, every shallow and pebble, every current and eddy between those two places; and so he did, but he hadn't the slightest idea of the country beyond the banks."

"And it is so delightful to have all the work done for you," said Phyllis.

"And not to have some one shout out 'Now then! Time, time!' just as you are gazing on some delightful bit of scenery," added Dora.

"And not to be slanged about your steering," remarked Mrs. Torneywayne, with a toss of her head, indicating her husband. "I fancy we have the most comfortable place in the boat, too."

And so they had. The Colonel, who was an old traveller, always insisted upon his womenfolk starting in good time. They had all been down at the boat by nine o'clock, before the rest of the passengers began to



arrive. He secured the seat in the stern; he saw that there were plenty of cushions and hassocks provided, and the three ladies in their fresh, crisp morning dresses, their Malmaison carnations, and their warm-coloured wraps and shawls which were spread over the seat, made a vastly pretty picture; at least, so thought Stillmere and Claymer when they arrived a little before the boat started.

The movement and behaviour of the steamer seemed to be quite in harmony with the surrounding landscape. There was no violent blowing off of steam, as if the whole thing might explode the next moment; there was no hurry, no bustle, no shouting. The captain looked at his watch and then looked at the steward, the steward looked at the passengers and then looked at the gangway. The general idea of the captain seemed to be that, as it was just half-past nine, they might as well start; and the steward seemed to indicate that, as they had a sort of character for punctuality, it wouldn't be a bad idea to be on the move, don't you know—so, without any fuss or commotion, at exactly thirty minutes past nine, the steamer glided away from the wharf at Folly Bridge.

Past the University barges and Christchurch Meadow, past the mouth of the Cherwell, the University boat-house, and other well-known spots, which recall to the Colonel a thousand reminiscences of his old Oxford days, and then they presently glide into Iffley Lock.

"There's one thing I regret about the river of to-day," said the Colonel, "that is the old locks that were in existence when I was a boy. They were leaky, they were dilapidated, they were terribly dangerous, but gloriously picturesque. Sometimes the keeper was away, and you had to get out and work the lock yourself. In those days a Thames trip had something of an air of adventure about it. But now everything is made so smooth and easy. Now look at this steamer ——"

"Well, Jack," said his wife, "I think you're very lazy. You call yourself a real water-rat. To-day you are in a steamer, and yesterday you were driving—when are you going to do any rowing?"

"My dear Child, we shall probably have plenty of that later on. But I confess I am beginning to resemble that 'rowing man' who had a tremendous reputation as an authority on the river. He used to habit himself in

faultless rowing costume and drive in a close fly from one Thames inn to another, then sit on the lawn and smoke and talk. He passed the whole summer doing this, but he never dreamed of getting into a boat. And yet he had the reputation of being an authority on all riverain matters. I have known many a reputation in literature, art, science, and politics built on a much slenderer foundation.

"Yes, there's ——" said Stillmere.

"Oh, don't mention any names," replied the Colonel, "his solicitor might be on board. But here we are at Sandford. I recollect, one broiling hot Sunday, walking over from Abingdon and getting some wonderfully fine old ale at the King's Arms here. If people knew what they were about, they would have all river inns at the locks."

"Good idea," replied Claymer. "Some people seem to think locks a nuisance. I like them because they give the eye a rest, and your arms as well, if you happen to be rowing. The Thames without locks would be like a story that wasn't divided into chapters ——"

"Well," said Dora, "I think the chapter between Iffley and Sandford has been rather dull ——"

"People or scenery, Dora?" asked her aunt.

"Oh, scenery, of *course*, Auntie," replied the damsel, with a saucy glance at Ralph.

"Ah! you'll find an improvement now," said her uncle, as the steamer passed out of the lock. "In the landscape I mean; there's no room for improvement in the figures. Look to your right, you will see Radley Wood; a little further on is the College. And then, on your left, Nuneham Woods are pretty enough; presently you see Carfax Conduit, which was given—no one knows why—by Oxford to Lord Harcourt. And now we have passed the eyot, just look back at the cottages, the rustic bridge, and the woods behind, and say if your fresh chapter is not a considerable improvement on the last."

The river, after flowing beneath the railway bridge, takes a tremendous curve, first to the left and then to the right; you pass the entrance to the old river on the left, a little while afterwards the ferry, and then find yourself in Abingdon Lock. On emerging therefrom you get a fine view of the ancient bridge and its quaint inn and the island, with a glimpse of the old Town Hall and the spire of Saint Helen's Church towering over everything. Does not

that graceful spire appear in Turner's painting and in every picture or photograph of the town that has ever yet seen daylight? There are few towns on the Thames present such a picturesque appearance from the water as Abingdon, whether seen from above or below bridge. Whether viewed from the outside or the inside, the town will strike the stranger as being singularly attractive and abounding with quaint old houses, delightful gardens, and buildings possessing not a little historical interest and antiquarian value.

Our party, who with considerable regret quitted the leisurely ease of the *Clieveden* at the landing-place and took their way to the Queen's Hotel, were particularly struck with the charm of the old town. They were met by Weatherbrow, who took charge of all the wraps, books, and packages, who reported himself quite well again, and who had driven the waggonette over from Oxford, engaged rooms at the hotel, and had been up to the station for the luggage. As they passed over the bridge the Colonel said—

"Now, Dora, you recollect after we left New Bridge we passed through Besilsleigh ——"

"Well, yes, I do. What then, Uncle?"

"What then, Dora? Why, you must know," he added solemnly, with a twinkle in his eye, "this bridge was built almost five hundred years ago with stone given by Sir Peter Besils of that place ——"

"S—sh! Auntie, do stop him. Don't let him try to improve our minds. We suffered quite enough from the Barlow Company, Limited—very limited I should say—aboard the *Otter*. I believe he carries a guide-book in his pocket and looks up facts on the sly. If you don't interfere, Dora's uncle will be as great a nuisance as Tozer's uncle was in 'Dombey and Son'—I declare I shall be obliged to ——"

But what Miss Daynflete would have been obliged to do no one ever knew, for at that moment they emerged into the Market Square, which changed the current of her thoughts. The place is never crowded, and at that time it was almost deserted. The ancient and modern houses with which it is surrounded, with the Queen's Hotel, faced by Inigo Jones's finely proportioned Market House, the Jubilee statue of Her Majesty standing below it, and the whole place apparently sleeping in the sunshine, seemed to be possessed of a colour,

a quaintness, and a dignity that recalled the *place* of some fine old Continental town, and came quite as a surprise to those who were previously unacquainted with it.

Abingdon is a sort of place when you once get into it you are not likely to leave in a hurry, and our little company passed several days there very pleasantly. They took drives to all sorts of interesting places in the neighbourhood — among them the hospital and church of Ewelme, with the tomb of the granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer, the Duchess of Suffolk; they viewed the town from the top of the Market House, and thoroughly explored Saint Helen's Church. Mighty enjoyable and merry were the dinners in the evening, and very amusing the post-prandial impromptu concerts, in which the exquisite singing of Phyllis Feyton constituted a most important feature.

All this time they were waiting for the boat, which should have arrived long ago from New Bridge. They all wondered that the usually prompt and infallible Salter should have been so neglectful; but when one morning the Colonel found he had put the letter, not in the post, but in the pocket of another coat, the

merriment of the whole party was unbounded, and the delinquent himself never heard the last of his neglect from his nieces.

The morning they were leaving, the three men had been taking a walk after their morning header and were coming through Saint Helen's Churchyard, swinging their towels, when they saw the door of the hall of Christ's Hospital open. They looked in and saw a very pretty picture. There was a wondrously effective background of dark oak panelling, of ancient carving, and brilliant stained-glass windows of the arms of the founders, with some quaint pictures and rare old portraits; there was one of the old ladies from the almshouses explaining the different pictures, and listening to her were Phyllis and Dora.

Dora was sitting upon the massive oaken table and swinging a pair of shapely feet, like a schoolgirl, and the graceful Phyllis was gazing down and listening with a sympathetic expression to the ancient, wrinkled, garrulous dame. The whole scene made a vastly pretty picture; and the three men stood back when they saw that the old lady was telling some sorrowful tale that made both



"A WONDROUSLY EFFECTIVE BACKGROUND OF DARK OAK PANELLING.

the girls look sad. Presently Phyllis took her purse out and gave something to the old lady, and Dora slipped something into her hand.

"Ah!" said the Colonel in a whisper, "why cannot some of the kodakular contingent photograph a scene like that?"

The two girls passed out and found the three men outside.

"What are you three doing lurking about here?" said Phyllis.

"I know," rejoined Dora. "Uncle Jack has come to see Sir Peter Besil's portrait. And," she added, clapping her hands, "he's come on a half-crown day. If he doesn't come in quickly he'll find it's five shillings!"

Dora stood at the entrance and levelled gate-money on them all, which sum eventually found its way into the pocket of the old lady whose tale of distress they had listened to. Having paid their respects to the counterfeit presentment of Sir Peter, and the Colonel having said he looked just the sort of man who would supply building materials for a bridge, they all then returned to breakfast, the two girls each seizing their uncle by an arm and leaving Guy and Ralph to follow.

As the two friends strolled along together

they had some conversation about returning to town, for they came to the conclusion that possibly Mrs. Torncywayne and her party might be getting a bit tired of them.

"Fact is," said Ralph, "we drifted into the thing unexpectedly walking back from Inglesham Church, then we drifted from New Bridge to Oxford, then from Oxford on here, and where we shall drift to next, goodness knows ——"

"Yes, this drifting is mighty pleasant," answered Guy, looking serious, "but it can't go on for ever."

"'Swiftly on wings of love, I flew to meet her!'" sang Claymer.

"Don't be an ass," said his friend.

"'Coldly she welcomed me as I did greet her!'" continued the irrepressible songster.

"Ralph, you're a silly fool. *Do* be serious for once in your life; it's just possible we have been travelling in this pleasant company quite long enough ——"

"Ah! ——"

"I mean they'll be sick of us if we stay much longer, so I shall say something during breakfast and you must back me up!"

And so it came to pass, after many attempts,

Guy told Mrs. Torneywayne towards the close of the meal that "they had had a most delightful time, but that he feared he and Claymer would be compelled to return to town shortly—in point of fact, that day."

Phyllis started, and then pretended to be deeply interested in a letter she had before her. Dora frowned and kicked her uncle under the table, and her aunt showed a distinct gleam of sorrow as she turned her pretty brown eyes on Guy and waited for a further explanation. Stillmere was conscious that he had managed the thing somewhat awkwardly, and Claymer did not back him up in the least, but pretended to be particularly interested in a morning paper that he was holding upside down.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Stillmere?" said the Colonel. "No telegrams or annoying letters, I trust? The morning post is generally the thing that ruins a pleasant expedition like this."

Dora whispered to her uncle that she was present when the post came in, and there was nothing either for Mr. Stillmere or Mr. Claymer. The Colonel's face brightened again, and his wife's eyes sparkled as she said—

"I'm afraid we're rather a humdrum party,

Mr. Stillmere. Only a sort of Darby and Joan, with two big wilful girls—whom it's difficult to manage. It was so good of you to help us to bring the boat down, but, now we are boatless, I don't think you ought to desert us."

"No, *mean!*" interpolated Dora, shaking her shoulders.

"Dora, if you're not quiet I shall send you to bed," said her aunt, and then turning to Guy, with a smile, said, "I would not go quite so far as my niece in her expression of opinion, but we should be very sorry to lose you, and unless very pressing affairs take you away, and you can endure this family party for a little while longer, we shall, indeed, be grateful if you would help us further in our expedition. What do *you* say, Mr. Claymer?"

Ralph in his anxiety to be polite to Mrs. Torneywayne, in his desire to still continue this pleasant drifting, and in his honest wish to support his friend and make his excuses seem plausible, so absolutely muddled the whole affair that everybody roared with laughter, and Dora shook her head at him solemnly, and said she feared he was not quite so truthful as he might be.

## CHAPTER TENTH — *A RURAL DRIVE*

*"By bankrupt inns with stables closed, o'er roads in sorry plight,
Where once the landlords robbed by day and highwaymen by night."*
THE OLD TIMER.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the talk, all the discussion, all the objections and excuses, by noon the next day the same party found themselves occupying their old places in the waggonette, leaving the useful Weatherbrow behind to look after the luggage and take it with him to Wallingford. Mrs. Torneywayne protested against again being on wheels.

"My dear Child," exclaimed the Colonel, "we can't help it; we've no boat, we can't stop at Abingdon for the rest of our natural lives, and I want the girls really to see the Valley of the Thames—a thing that is impossible if you stick for ever in a boat."

They left the good old town with not a little regret; they drove out over the ancient

bridge—and you may be sure the Colonel did not omit to allude to Sir Peter Besils—past the causeway, and crossed the white-railed viaduct where the old river once more joins the present navigable stream. They not only had a fine view of the Thames Valley, but a fine prospect of the surrounding country.

They passed by Culham and Culham College; they paused for a while at Clifton Hampden; they drove across the red brick bridge, and halted for a few minutes at the Barley Mow in order that the girls might see the interior of that quaint old hostelry. Then, proceeding and noting the picturesque houses and ancient cottages at Burcott, they presently have a fine view of Sinodun Hill and its clump of trees. Whichever way they look they are unable to get rid of it, and it seems to be continually turning up in unexpected places. During the whole drive from Abingdon to Wallingford one is seldom out of sight of the Thames, and some of the glimpses obtained from time to time are surprisingly attractive.

But possibly the most interesting point of the journey was found at Dorchester. And what a sleepy old-fashioned village it is! How picturesque is the irregular street with its quaint

houses and antique cottages, with their well-toned red brick, their lichen-covered roofs, and their gay gardens! There is a pleasant perfume of wall-flowers, there is a scent of lilac, and the place is so quiet that our party made quite a sensation when they pulled up at the Fleur-de-Lys. Probably half the population of the place turned out to welcome the waggonette with an air of faint surprise, but finding the horses were not likely to run away, and there was no distribution of coppers, this half of the population turned in again and either went to dinner or to sleep. After the horses were put up and the Colonel had ordered what he was pleased to call a snack, they took a turn round the place while it was being prepared.

"Well, I *am* disappointed," said Phyllis. "I thought we were coming to see a real town. Where are the three churches, the town hall, the market house, the shire hall, the county museum, and where, pray, Uncle Jack, are the cavalry barracks?"

"Birmingham and Sandringham and Arlington and Darlington and Torrington and Warrington and Rochester and Ryde and Lartington and Partington and Porchester and Dorchester

—you'll find all about 'em in your *Bradshaw's Guide*," sang the Colonel so merrily that he caused a mild young curate, who happened to be passing, to put him down as a rollicking bean-feaster, and made Mrs. Torneywayne say "Jack!" sharply, while a frown struggled with a smile.

"My dear Phyllis, my only joy," continued the Colonel, roaring with laughter, "you've been reading up the wrong place. Your silly little head has been running its curly locks against the capital of Dorsetshire, which you can easily find all about in your *Bradshaw's Guide*, but this place is never mentioned in that yellow-covered volume devoted to unravelling the mysteries of the tangle of trains. A place that is not in *Bradshaw* is a joy indeed, and that is the reason I brought you here!"

They found the Colonel had by no means over-estimated the interest of the village. The fine old yew outside the church must be well nigh five hundred years old, and though one side has been somewhat spoiled by the depredations of a wood-carver, who in bygone times used to come in the night and cut away choice branches, it still makes a brave show. In the rare old abbey church of Saint Peter



"IN THE OLD ABBEY CHURCH OF ST PETER AND ST PAUL

and Saint Paul they spent a considerable time; they explored the village, they wandered beside the Thame, in the direction of the Thames, and they came back and lounged on the bridge in the sunshine, and listened to the Colonel's project for converting the Thame into a trout stream.

"The Black Canons established themselves here a good many hundred years ago," said he, "and fish of the best quality they took good care to have. Pope speaks of 'the winding Isis and the fruitful Thame,' so I think, with due attention, we might convert it into a profitable speculation. 'The Thame Trout Company' would not be so wild a speculation as you might imagine. Now, if any of you would like to take shares, this is a fine opportunity. Colonel Torneywayne will join the board after allotment."

"Jack, luncheon must be ready," said Mrs. Torneywayne, "and if I know anything about Colonel Torneywayne—which I fear from sad experience I do—he would rather join the board before allotment than after."

After luncheon they were soon on the road again. They crossed the Thame, having a fine view of Wittenham Woods on the right,

and again Sinodun Hill, "always coming up to time smiling when you would least expect to see it," as Ralph said, and took their way along the high road never far distant from the river. A drive of a couple of miles further brings them to Shillingford—an old-fashioned village—and it was a question whether they should cross the Thames by Shillingford Bridge and reach Wallingford by the shorter way. As the afternoon was lovely, and a balmy breeze was just beginning to temper the extreme heat of the day, every one voted for the longer road. Scarcely two miles further they found themselves in Bensington, or Benson as the place is colloquially termed.

This is now a quiet enough village, but was a place of no little importance in the good old coaching days. Being on the road from Henley to Oxford, it must have been a place of considerable consequence as a posting-station. Probably there are postboys of seventy, guards of eighty, or coachmen of ninety still residing hereabouts who could give you marvellous accounts of the number of mail-coaches that passed through here in the course of the day, "the quality" who sojourned at the various inns, and the bustle and life that pervaded

the place from morning till night. Possibly, if you gossiped with some of these people long enough, you would hear thrilling stories of the "gentlemen of the road" on Gould's Heath, and startling anecdotes of the uproarious revelry and the drinking bouts at some of the fine old hostelries, now disestablished, that took place in former times.

There is little bustle or business about Benson in the present day; the regular road traffic is said to be confined to the Wallingford omnibus twice daily; many of the large inns have been pulled down, and not a few of them have been converted into private dwellings. There is a strange fascination about a place like this. One can easily pick out the converted inns, and cannot help peopling them with the inmates of a bygone age, and wondering if the inhabitants are ever disturbed by ghostly mail-coaches driving up in the middle of the night. Are they awakened by the clangour of bells? Are they haunted by the apparitions of burly coachmen, of active guards, and expert ostlers? Do they ever dream that they are compelled to give up their own comfortable beds to ghostly visitors, or do they suffer from a nightmare in which bottles of port,

wax candles, long bills, bowls of punch, plump landlords, ancient four-post mausoleums, and never-sufficiently-tipped waiters are strangely mixed?

After they get clear of Benson, they turn off to the right, and presently reach Crowmarsh. This is little more than a long street. A little beyond it they cross Wallingford Bridge, and in a few minutes find themselves rattling up the High Street of the old-fashioned town and turning into the yard of that good old-fashioned inn, The Lamb. Here they are received by the invaluable Weatherbrow, who has engaged rooms, bestowed the luggage in the different apartments, and ordered dinner, which he informs them will be on the table at half-past seven.

## CHAPTER ELEVENTH — *LAUNCHING AND LUNCHING*

*"Launching and lunching in pleasant society—*
*Bright is the sunshine and soft is the breeze:*
*Riverain beauties in endless variety,*
*See as you lounge 'neath the awning at ease."*
LAUNCH LYRICS.

"I HOPE we're going to start early to-day, Jack," said Mrs. Torneywayne as the party were assembled at breakfast. "If there's any rowing to be done, and it's about time it was, we ought to be off in good time ——"

"Well, the truth is, Child, I'm rather in a fix. I went down this morning to see if I could find a boat, but there isn't one that will do, and so ——"

"No, Jack, I will not drive any more. You know very well that between here, or at any rate between Moulsford and Maple Durham, is the prettiest part of the river, and it's too hot to-day to drive along dusty roads ——"

"If your ladyship would only hear me out instead of indulging in your infantine diversion of jumping at conclusions, you would find

that dusty roads do not enter into to-day's programme. Fact is, when I was down at the landing-stage, who should arrive in his launch but the Skipper. He has some friends aboard; they're steaming a little way up, and will be calling here about one; he sent his kind regards to you, and he would be most happy to take our party down—he has plenty of room."

After considerable discussion this proposition was agreed to, and the whole party found themselves on the landing-stage at the appointed time. They did not have long to wait; Salter's down steamer had just arrived, and the up one was not in sight when the *Lymphad* came alongside, and the Skipper might be seen waving his cap. He had a very nice party on board, and not too many. Everybody called him the Skipper, and, being universally popular, it was scarcely a matter of surprise that he got plenty of pleasant and amusing people about him. Being pleasant and amusing himself, he seemed to possess the art of developing those qualities in his guests. You rarely met a bore at any of his festive gatherings, and if you did you never met him a second time.

They only stopped just long enough to ship

their passengers, and then steamed under Wallingford Bridge, passing on the right the pleasant mansion of Mr. George Leslie, the Royal Academician, endeared to all lovers of the Thames not only for the charming pictures painted on its banks but for his well-known and delightful volume "Our River." On the same side you may presently notice Winterbrook. Opposite this is the little village of Newnham Murrell, followed by Mongewell and North Stoke, each with its accompanying church.

"People ought to be very good in these parts," said the Colonel, "for in less than six miles from Wallingford to Streatley you may count seven churches as you pass along the stream."

"That's true enough!" answered the Skipper. "I am not sure that there are not one or two more."

Moulsford Asylum is then passed on the right, then the village of Little Stoke on the left. Then comes a brilliant green eyot, and they glide under the famous skew-built railway bridge which was thought a triumph of engineering when it was first erected. Presently Moulsford Church is seen embowered among

trees, and the comfortable little hostelry with a quaint title, The Beetle and Wedge, with the ferry and the straggling picturesque little hamlet of South Stoke opposite.

As they approach Cleeve Lock, glancing up the backwater and just showing some of its chimneys amid the trees, may be seen "The Temple," a charming residence, full of pleasant associations with many on board. For here it was that Edmund Yates spent several summers some years ago. All who knew him knew what a delightful host he was, and what an enthusiastic and devoted lover of the Thames, and nothing he enjoyed better than to have his old friends around him in the many sojourns he made on its banks. The dreamy days aboard the *Syren* and, later still, on the *Pleione*, with our host's "kind-eyed old colley," whom he loved so well, sleeping in the sunshine, the merry dinners at eventide, and the post-prandial smoke and amusing chat on the lawn afterwards, the stillness of summer night only being broken by the music of the weir, must occur to many as they think of the good old times, when they pass nowadays through Cleeve Lock.

As they move out of the lock, the scenery

seems to change at once, the flat sedge-bordered banks disappear, and are replaced by trees and shrubs, while on the right you get a fine view of Streatley Hill. Indeed, as you depart from Cleeve Lock you seem to be entering a lake, with the hill, in all its beauty of colour, all its tenderness of tone, all its ever-changing aspect of sun and cloud shadow, rising grandly in front of you. Orders were given for the speed to be reduced to a minimum, and the *Lymphad* glided along almost imperceptibly, and well-nigh noiselessly. Some one asked on board whether this view had not been painted by Keeley Halswelle.

"Yes, I fancy from somewhere about this point," said the Colonel. "I was thinking of him that very moment because he had his house-boat, *The Kelpie*, moored at the spot we've just passed on the left. I recollect so well calling on him one day when we were pulling down from Wallingford. We went in and had a glass of ale and a pipe, and he showed us a lot of delicious, fresh studies that seemed to be the very essence of Thames scenery. Some of these studies were absolutely marvellous, and, *I* think, finer than his finished works."

"Goring has increased since those days, hasn't it, Colonel?" said the Skipper.

"By Jove, yes!" he replied, looking somewhat indignant. "I confess I think all this building will drive the artists somewhere else, if it isn't checked. What with villas and houses and bungalows, we may live to see the day when there will be almost a continuous terrace of houses from Richmond to Oxford. I hear that the rage for house-boats is somewhat diminishing. With the crowds that throng the river nowadays at all points, it is always a marvel to me the whole thing is so little spoilt. I suppose below Cleeve is the beginning of the house-boats, and they continue at intervals well-nigh down to Kingston."

They just caught a sight of the quaint waterside Swan at Streatley, which has been celebrated in song, before entering Goring Lock; and as they passed out of it, those who were long familiar with the scene, as well as those who were not, were charmed with the prospect. The combination of fine trees, of ancient roofs, of the old mill, of tumbling water, of the long white bridge and the magnificent hill, a very feast of varied and tender colour from its tree-shaded base

to its sunlit crown, make a wonderful picture. Add to this the rushing of the water mingled with the flutter of the foliage, the warm sun, the pure atmosphere, and the gentle breeze—in short a harmony of colour, sound, and scent that cause one to imagine everything must tend to the development of a supreme feeling of content in this happy valley.

"Why," said Lady Larrinder, "the very fact of existence should be a joy in these parts. People who dwell here should be well satisfied."

"You'd think so," rejoined the Skipper, "and yet at one time inhabitants of these twin villages, connected by the long white bridge, were utterly opposed to one another. There was a feud between them as bitter as that of the Montagues and Capulets. The Goringians and the Streatleyans regarded one another as an altogether different race, and declined to intermarry, to sympathise, or to do business with one another. This has probably been altogether extinguished by modern progress and education."

"I am told, too," remarked the Colonel, "that a similar antipathy once existed between the Pangbourneans and Whitchurchmen at the

next twin villages, more than four miles below."

"There is a spring here that at one time was held in great repute for brightening the eyes," said the Skipper. "I wonder whether the people of Goring would allow their neighbours from the opposite side of the water to enjoy its benefits. I rather expect it was the pleasant prospect from the village and change of air that had the beneficial effect rather than the water. But I don't know," he added in an undertone to Mrs. Torneywayne; "Miss Furleigh looks as though she might have taken the opportunity of her visit to Gorin to drink at the Spring-well."

And Mrs. Torneywayne saw the girl who, with a sister or a cousin, had rejoined the launch at Goring Lock in animated conversation with Claymer. Ralph thought he recognised her when she was waiting on the bank, and when she stepped aboard was quite certain that it was the little lady whose canoe they saved, and whom they last saw walking away from Castle Eaton Bridge in a long drab mackintosh through the pouring rain. She had seen Claymer and Stillmere as the boat came into the lock, and had pointed the two

men out to her cousin as those who had rescued her on that rainy day. For this little bit of romance had been quite an event in the prosaic lives of these two girls, and had often been talked over between them since.

"Hope you got the mackintosh all right?" said Flo Furleigh to Ralph.

Dora heard what she said, gave a look up, and went on chattering to a young Guardsman who was devoting himself to her. She heard Ralph reply in a very low tone; she could not catch the words, and gave an absolutely wrong answer to some question her Guardsman asked. Then more conversation went on in an undertone, then there were peals of laughter, and Stillmere and the cousin joined in, and the hilarity in that part of the boat became general.

"It's my opinion you've all been drinking at the Spring-well in that corner," said the Skipper, "and that you have been qualifying the water. And that reminds me that it is quite time we had luncheon."

As it was all ready and the guests were pretty hungry, they did not require a second invitation. And they fell to with a will, taking luncheon and glimpses of the scenery

alternately. They observed The Grotto and Basildon Church, then gliding under the railway arch; then round the curve, and getting the magnificent prospect of Hart's Wood on the left, of which Vicat Cole painted a superb picture; then passed the eyot, where Hart's Old Lock used to be, getting a glimpse of Basildon House on the right, the peace of the scene being occasionally disturbed by a passing train.

Then along under Shooter's Hill—which, it may be remembered, formed an admirable theme for one of Keeley Halswelle's most effective works, by Pangbourne Cottage—where the Colonel gave a terrific account of the most fearful storm he ever recollected on the Upper Thames, when he was aboard a house-boat, just opposite, and the anchor gave way, and they were nearly blown over the weir in the middle of the night. Past Ashley's Wharf, the quaint Swan Inn—whose sign was painted by a gifted lady amateur—the wondrous agglomeration of picturesque materials made by the weir, the tumbledown buildings, the red roofs, the fine ash trees, and the varied foliage, and at last gliding slowly into Whitchurch Lock.

Below the lock, after you have lost sight of the finely-toned ancient buildings of Whitchurch, passed under the long white bridge, by Bridge House, with its bright parterre of flowers, you still find the river most attractive, although it has somewhat altered in character. The high hills on the left have receded from the banks and left long flat spaces of luxuriant pasture and park land to which the well-treed range forms a most delightful background. In parts it almost looks as if the meadow sloped downwards, and gives one the notion that some of the houses are below the level of the river. This, however, is probably an optical illusion.

All this time Flo Furleigh was talking incessantly to Claymer, and Ralph glanced at Dora when he thought she was not looking, and Dora gazed upon Ralph when she thought he did not observe her. Dora was feeling rather sad, although she was making the handsome young Guardsman feel miserable, which at any other time would have given her the keenest delight. The cousin seemed to have appropriated Stillmere, who was getting somewhat weary, and had once more relapsed into a cynical humour. Phyllis was well occupied in conversing with an accomplished

and popular American, whom every one called the Senator, and who was a great admirer of England and English customs, an ardent worshipper of English girls, and an enthusiast concerning the Thames.

Mrs. Torneywayne was chatting with the Skipper, and the Colonel was having a talk with regard to the painters of Thames scenery with the accomplished Lady Larrinder, who is equally clever with her brush and her pen. The pleasant sextet which had harmonized so delightfully the last few days seemed to have broken up, and poor little Dora, getting terribly bored with her faultlessly dressed Guardsman, wondered if she could be the same person who voyaged from Lechlade to New Bridge, and came to the conclusion that those delightful hours must have been a very long time ago.

They pass on the left that fine old mansion Hardwick House, with its lovely gardens and terraces, its ancient oaks, cedars, elms, and yews. When one remembers that Charles the First used to love to stay here and amuse himself with playing bowls, one comes to the conclusion that His Most Gracious Majesty showed great taste in the selection of his bowling-green and its surroundings.

The approach to Maple Durham is wonderfully picturesque: the church, the mill, the poplars — though some of the finest have perished — the old roofs, and the luxuriant foliage and brilliant turf on all sides constitute a most attractive picture. Here they say good-bye to the steam-launch party, as Weatherbrow is to meet them at this point with the waggonette. They are a little before their time, and he has not yet arrived, and the Skipper tries to persuade them to go on down to Henley, but they elect to carry out their original design.

After they had seen the *Lymphad* steam away—Flo Furleigh was waving her handkerchief till the boat disappeared round the bend, and Dora was regarding her with ineffable disgust—they wandered about the lock, they explored the curious nooks, they inspected the mill, they viewed the beauties of the weir, they walked in the park, roamed down the avenue, and had peeps of that delightful Elizabethan mansion Maple Durham House. Mighty pleasant did they find this lazy lounging after the moving panorama they had gone through since mid-day. They returned to the lock at five, and shortly Weatherbrow appeared with

the waggonette. Dora, who had been rather silent during the stroll round Maple Durham, said she felt the heat a good deal, and would like to sit in front with her uncle and get the air—if auntie did not mind.

Her aunt smiled, and told her to jump up, and herself sat beside Claymer, with Stillmere opposite. Amid those four there seemed to be no embarrassment whatever, and they talked merrily as they went along. They drove through the village of Purley, then round to the left, and passing by Kentwood Grove, and keeping pretty close to the railway, after a time they enter the outskirts of Reading. They do not, however, go far into the town, but, turning off sharp to the left, cross the Thames over Caversham Bridge, then bearing away to the right by Caversham Park, through Sonning Eye, and by the French Horn.

Then, with the memory of Frederick Walker's picture realized before them, they drive leisurely over the bridge, and arrive at the White Hart to find a cordial welcome from the courteous landlord, the river looking lovely in the evening light, and the garden fragrant with the scent and gay with the bloom of roses.

## CHAPTER TWELFTH — *AT HOME ON THE "SNAIL"*

> "Fay ce que voudras! *How time seems to fly,*
> *Aboard our good House-boat in dreamy July!"*
>
> FLOATING FANCIES.

BOTH Stillmere and Claymer were becoming somewhat painfully sensitive with regard to outstaying their welcome, and letters had arrived that morning which made them feel that their presence in town was necessary, and therefore the matter was seriously propounded to Mrs. Torneywayne at the breakfast table.

"It's too bad of you to desert us," said that lady, "before you've seen us safely to our destination. I had hoped you might have stopped a day or two with us aboard the house-boat—there is ample accommodation for you on the tender, and we haven't quarrelled yet ——"

As she looked at Dora, a pretty pink came

into the damsel's cheeks which she tried to hide by smelling a bunch of deep red roses she had beside her plate.

"But who knows, Mrs. Torneywayne," replied Ralph, as he smiled and glanced at Dora, "if we stayed much longer, we might become the bitterest enemies? Fancy six bitter enemies in a house-boat. If you live in a house-boat you mustn't fall out ——"

"No, not unless you wish to get wet or commit suicide," said the Colonel.

"That's very good, Uncle Jack, very good indeed—for *you!*"

"Ah! Miss Phyl, we shan't have any more of your impudent speeches there. Once aboard the *Snail* and you won't be allowed out of the kitchen—the galley, I mean."

"It seems I shall be a sort of galley slave. But a cook is the most powerful person in the world. And *this* cook will make *that* tyrant terr-emble."

"And let me be butler, Auntie," said Dora, "and we will make them all abject slaves! '

After some further discussion it was settled that Stillmere and Claymer, who really were obliged to return to town, should accompany

the party to the house-boat and go up from Shiplake Railway Station, which was at no great distance from the Colonel's moorings. They were allowed to go, however, only on the condition that they would come down later on and stay for a few days. This they faithfully promised to do, and both Phyllis and Dora's faces brightened when they heard this. Dora was certainly softening somewhat, and did not think so hardly as she had done of Ralph yesterday; indeed, she began to think the trip would be robbed of a great deal of its charm when he departed. That was probably the reason she was unusually gracious and considerate towards him and gave him one of the red roses from her bouquet.

"Quite disgraceful!" said Mrs. Torneywayne, as she took the rudder-lines at starting. "This is the first time the crew have all been in their places during this trip. What a lovely morning!"

"So it is, Child. But if I know anything about weather," answered the Colonel, "we shall have rain before we are well through Shiplake Lock."

The Colonel took the sculls. Phyllis sat beside Mrs. Torneywayne, Guy pulled stroke,

Ralph bow—thus he was very near to Dora, who was coquettishly curled, a pretty symphony of pouting white muslin and fluttering frills, in the head of the boat.

"I feel quite at home here, Jack," said Mrs. Torneywayne. "After all, I think this is the prettiest part of the river."

"That's what most people say on the Thames, Child, till they reach another part of it; but of course you know every inch of it hereabouts, which makes all the difference. Ah! there's Patrick's stream," he added, indicating it by a jerk of the head over his left shoulder. "Now, if these silly fellows weren't going up to town, we might go down that way."

But Mrs. Torneywayne, with woman's tact, knew her guests meant going, and steered round to the left.

They leave Hallimead Ait and the Lynch on the right, and then they have a fine prospect of a portion of the village of Shiplake on the hill, and the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul —where, by the way, Tennyson was married— peeping out amid the trees. Presently they see Phillimore Island on the right and Phillimore House on the opposite bank, have a glimpse of

the picturesque mill beyond the poplars in front of them, and, taking a flying note of the tents and the campers-out on the left, run into Shiplake Lock. This lock is generally peopled with plenty of loungers, for it is a source of infinite excitement to the campers-out. Here, too, sellers of fresh fruit often do a good business with the passing boats, and vendors of vegetables find a market for their produce among the owners of house-boats.

The lock does not happen to be very full of boats, and our friends are quickly out of it. They are soon under the wooden viaduct of the Henley branch of the Great Western Rail, and have a fine view of Wargrave Hill. They presently pass the mouth of the Loddon on the right, and at no great distance beyond on the same side may be seen, looking as if it almost sprang out of the reeds, Saint Mary's Church, and Dora is much amused by Ralph telling her that Day, the author of "Sandford and Merton"—"the inventor of her friend, Mr. Barlow"—is buried there. Next, the Colonel points out two charming houses which were at different times occupied by his friend Edmund Yates, and then they reach Wargrave Ferry.

"Ah! don't you remember, Child, Mortimer Collins's lines beginning—

> Who knows not Wargrave, on the sinuous Thames,
> Where emerald lawns down to the river slope!

I wonder some one does not collect the river lyrics of most musical Mortimer. No one understood better, or sang of the Thames more sweetly than he."

There was a question as to whether they should land here or not. Phyllis was anxious to see the sign of Saint George and the Dragon, the work of two distinguished Royal Academicians, Mr. G. D. Leslie and Mr. J. E. Hodgson, but the Colonel thought they had better push on as it looked like rain.

"We have not much further to go," said he, "and I fancy if we put our backs into it we shall just get in ten minutes before the storm comes on."

He was, however, quite out in his calculations, for after they had passed the eyot on the left, it looked blacker than ever, and before they had got well by The Willows the rain came down as hard as it could pelt. Every one had a mackintosh but Dora, and that silly little person had either left hers behind or dropped it overboard—at any rate it could not be found.

Fortunately Ralph had his spare waterproof with him, and recollecting how serviceable it had been on a former occasion, in spite of her protest he promptly put the little lady into it, turned up the collar, packed all the pouting muslin and pretty pink ribbons within it, and buttoned it securely from top to toe with an air of authority. She was rather rebellious at first, but he treated her like a little child and she was compelled to submit to be made what she called a "horrid guy."

"Ah! well, better be a dry guy than a wet one," said he.

At which Miss Daynflete tossed her head and tried to look dignified, but all the rest roared with laughter.

The shower was sharp enough while it lasted, but it did not last long. It ceased as suddenly as it began, and before they reached the end of their journey they were in bright sunshine again. On arrival at the *Snail* they found the invaluable Weatherbrow waiting to receive them. He appeared to be altogether transfigured—he was in a blue serge suit and a straw hat, and the coachman had become altogether obliterated by the waterman. The Colonel had often been heard to declare that

this valuable servant of his was the only man he knew who could drive a pair of half-broken horses and make rapid progress in a light punt against a swift stream with equal success.

Weatherbrow had sandwiches and drinks ready on the table in the saloon, and Guy and Ralph had just time to take a little light refreshment and walk up to the railway station. All their friends said they would come and see them off, and, as the weather still looked very doubtful, started as they were, fully mackintoshed.

When Stillmere and Claymer were seated in the train Dora said, "Oh, Mr. Claymer, here's your waterproof. I quite forgot. Won't you take it with you?" and she endeavoured to manipulate, without success, the big buttons.

"No, Miss Daynflete, I have mine on. That's only a spare one. Please take care of it for me."

"Then you'll come back and fetch it. Promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Oh, there are a lot of things in the pockets. May I have them?" said she, diving her hands into the capacious pockets.

"Why, certainly; but I don't think you'll

find anything but loose tobacco and a wooden pipe or two."

"But may I have everything I find?"

"Yes, as a reward for taking care of the mackintosh."

"For my very own?"

"For your very own."

"Are you going on, Colonel?" said the guard, touching his cap. "No? Right!" he shouted.

"You promise faithfully to come back," said Mrs. Torneywayne.

"Many thanks, we do most faithfully."

And the train puffed away from the station, hats were raised, handkerchiefs were waved, and the four took their departure somewhat sadly towards the river, and the two were whirled rapidly in the direction of hot, dusty, stifling London.

There was no doubt whatever that the departure of Stillmere and Claymer made a considerable blank in the merry party who had voyaged in company so pleasantly for the last few days; and could Guy or Ralph have been able to fathom the secrets of certain hearts—who *can* fathom the secrets of a girl's heart?—they might have felt considerably flattered.

No one, however, had much opportunity for regret, for Uncle Jack seldom gave anybody time to be dull, and there was plenty to do when they were once on board the house-boat. Weatherbrow and Tattersea—Tattersea was a smart little maid, generally known as Tatters, who could cook fairly, was a clever needlewoman, and could paddle a canoe with considerable skill—were the only servants on board, and they had lodgings in a cottage hard by—so a great deal of the arrangements devolved on Mrs. Torneywayne and her nieces. Phyllis betook herself to the kitchen, and saw that everything was properly arranged there, and that the dinner for that evening was not likely to be a failure.

Auntie sat herself down at a quaint little table in the corner and wrote a lot of letters, enjoying delightful glimpses of river scenery and picturesque episodes of Thames life every time she looked up from the writing-pad. Dora had a large basket of freshly-cut flowers in the saloon and a number of glasses before her, in which she was arranging the most tasteful of bouquets to decorate the various apartments. As for Uncle Jack, he was tremendously busy. He had his coat off and a white

Tam o'Shanter on his head. and there was no end to his activity.

He busied himself with running up flags, then he took huge lumps of ice out of their sawdust packing, put them in a net and washed them, and very nearly fell into the river whilst doing it, which entertained Dora prodigiously. Then he packed the blocks in the refrigerator, then he set to work with hammer and crowbar and pincers and attacked an obstinate packing-case—why do they always fasten up wine as if it was never intended to be opened?—and after much crashing and splitting and thumping, after many muttered imprecations, getting red in the face, and perspiring freely, he eventually succeeded in handing out a number of foil-necked bottles, which were subsequently solemnly conducted, some to the cellar, and a few to the ice-box by Weatherbrow.

## CHAPTER THIRTEENTH — *DORA'S DISCOVERY*

*"Who can diagnose a dimple, who can guage a maiden's mind?*
*Who can ever hope to fathom all the ways of womankind?"*
THE CYNIC'S SONATA.

WE may be allowed to wonder what Dora was dreaming about when she awoke one morning in her pretty little state-room.

It must have been something pleasant, because there was a merry gleam in those blue eyes which seemed to reflect the summer skies outside as she opened them. And then she pouted her red lips and shrugged her shapely shoulders as she turned in her soft white nest and thought it was too bad of Uncle Jack to wake her up so early and dissipate a dream that appeared to be so real. Yes, Uncle Jack was up pretty early you may be sure. He was rattling chains and coiling ropes overhead; he was conversing in stage whispers with Weatherbrow, which conversation might be heard all over the boat.

Anon came a stillness, and Dora fancied her uncle had thought better of it and had gone to bed again, and she buried her curls in the pillow and almost dozed off once more. Not a bit of it! Presently she heard a tremendous splash, and a voice, apparently addressing some one in the next parish, saying that the water was delicious—people who get up early in the morning and take headers always say the water is delicious. More splashing, snorting, and gulping. More talking, as if her uncle were giving an imitation of himself and doing it very badly too; and then the lazy lass put two pretty little feet out of bed, clasped her hands behind her head, lolled back on the pillow, and began to think it was time to get up.

Knock! knock! knock!

"Yes!" said Dora.

"Your bath's quite ready, miss," said Tattersea.

Then Dora knew there was not a moment to be lost. In two minutes she was splashing in her cold bath, and singing merrily the while. The bathroom was really an extra bedroom; but it had been provided with tubs, and was besides used as a place where boat-cushions,

sails, umbrellas, mackintoshes, and such like were stowed away. Dora knew that breakfast was punctually at eight, and so she was wonderfully expeditious. When she had once more assumed her pretty dressing-gown and was about to return to her room, she suddenly espied Claymer's mackintosh that she wore yesterday—she knew it at once by the peculiar big buttons—and she at once recollected that she had been told she might have everything that was in the pockets. Being in a mischievous mood, she at once cleared everything out and bore them away with her.

When she had finished dressing and found she had still a few moments to spare, she proceeded to inspect the treasure she had looted. There were two wooden pipes that had evidently been well smoked, three pink lock tickets, four pennies and a sixpence, a leather cigarette case with the monogram "R. C." These were not particularly interesting. But then came a pair of long *Suède* gloves that certainly were many sizes too small for Mr. Claymer, then a dainty little pocket handkerchief with the initials "F. F.", and then a copy of "Summer Songs," by Mortimer Collins.

Dora looked carelessly through this, and noted that several passages relating to the river, especially those of a somewhat tender nature, were underscored in pencil. She turned to the title-page, and saw it inscribed "Flo Furleigh, from her always affectionate R. C." In a moment she remembered hearing Miss Furleigh ask Mr. Claymer that day on board the launch "if he had received the mackintosh all right."

Despite the exercise of Phyllis's admirable culinary art, the first breakfast aboard the house-boat was somewhat dull, and the Colonel rallied his nieces on their quietness.

"Tell you what it is, if we don't get those chappies back again, you girls will soon get tired of this Darby-and-Joan life. Look here, Child," he added, addressing his wife, "if you don't turn on some young people pretty speedily, these children will soon be running away. There are some young fellows staying with the ——"

"You *dear* Uncle Jack," said Dora, kissing him, "you're better than all the young fellows in the world."

Uncle Jack was surprised at the earnestness of her tone, but that most observant of aunties

noted the little break in the voice, and the moist lashes of her niece, and as Dora climbed the ladder to the roof, her aunt and uncle exchanged a volume of conversation by means of eye-telegraphy. Mrs. Torneywayne was an adept in this art. Those who knew her well could often know exactly what she was thinking of without exchanging a word, and could learn her opinion at once by a glance at the varied expression of those fathomless brown eyes.

Dora sat on the roof all the morning, pretending to go through the illustrated papers, but she turned over the leaves listlessly, and it is to be feared the accomplished artists and authors who furnished their contents would scarcely have felt flattered at the little real attention she paid to their handiwork. Uncle Jack noticed this listless demeanour, and presently announced that he was going shopping in Wargrave, and that Dora was to accompany him.

"No, I don't think I will, uncle, I would rather ——"

"What," shouted the Colonel, "this is absolute mutiny! Obey orders at once and get ready. We'll take a luncheon basket with us.

There's a lovely breeze and we will sail up. In ten minutes I start ——"

This vigorous treatment was a fine tonic for Miss Dora, and she was aboard the dinghy to the second. As the Colonel said, there was a lovely breeze; it increased after they started; they had to take in a reef, and they sped merrily over the water. The Colonel said it was high time Dora knew how to sail a boat, and he forthwith resigned the command to her. He put the tiller in her hand, and he managed the sheet for her, and told her how she should steer. Once or twice they had the lee gunwale almost under water, and several times, on turning a corner, were nearly upset; but he knew Dora could swim like a fish, and was by no means certain that a sudden cold bath would not be an important element in his cure. There was no doubt of its success.

There was something exhilarating in tearing through the water and listening to the rush and rattle of the stream against the stem of the boat; there was something refreshing in meeting the tingling breeze, and there was an element of danger that added not a little to the excitement. A mighty pretty picture

did Dora make as she sat with the tiller in one hand and the sheet in the other, especially when a sudden gust made the boat heel well over, and she bit her lips and her eyes sparkled with delight.

The shopping at Wargrave did not take long. On the return journey the mast was struck; they kept close to the right-hand bank, by that charming little summer residence, with its long strip of emerald-green turf and brilliant garden close to the water, which Dora declared she would like to have for her very own, and then down the backwater. And a most picturesque and secluded backwater this is. You skirt the garden of The Willows on the left, and on the right you catch glimpses of York Farm, with the grounds of Hennerton House above it, and the pleasaunce surrounding Ivy Lodge beyond; you occasionally see portions of the high road to Henley, and you pass under picturesque bridges—one so low that Dora nearly knocked her head against the crown of the arch.

When they came to a delightfully quiet spot, that the Colonel averred had been exquisitely painted by Mr. Alfred Parsons, they ran the dinghy into the rushes and thoroughly enjoyed

the light luncheon that Phyllis had packed up for them.

This being finished, the Colonel once more took the sculls, and they wound slowly in and out the pretty stream, and Dora was soothed by the rhythmical plash of the sculls, the song of the sedges, and the sweet leaf lyrics of the willows. The little girl was getting quite herself again, and was regaining her excellent spirits. It so happened that they had not seen a single person or boat since they had entered the backwater. Uncle Jack had just been commenting on the fact when Dora said, as her eyes twinkled gladly—

"Boat coming up, Uncle. Is there room?"

"Yes; keep well in to the left bank, Dora."

He suddenly saw the expression on his niece's face change as she returned somewhat solemnly the "Good morning!" that was cheerily shouted from the approaching boat.

"Ah! good morning, Miss Furleigh," said the Colonel, when he saw who it was. "Are you staying down here?"

"Yes, Colonel, we're on the *Bulrush* with the Caverners," she answered, indicating with a toss of the head a good-humoured-looking young man who was sculling her.

"Well, Mrs. Torneywayne will be very glad if you'd care to give her a call," he replied, as the boats parted company.

"Uncle," whispered Dora, "I wish you hadn't."

"Hadn't what, my dear?"

"Asked her to call."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like her. I think she's an out-and-out flirt."

"Ah! I'm not much of a judge of that kind of thing. But," he added, with a laugh, "I dare say *you* are!"

Despite the absence of Stillmere and Claymer, notwithstanding Dora's deep dislike to Flo Furleigh, things went on pretty merrily beside the Thames, and the Colonel took pretty good care that the riverain amusements should not flag. Besides the house-boat duties, which were never for a moment neglected, there was plenty to be done, and both Phyllis and Dora said they always found the days too short. The eight o'clock breakfast was always rigidly insisted on, and they were all of them out and about long before this hour.

Sometimes the aunt and nieces got up very

early indeed, and in a clear backwater behind one of the islands which the Colonel had managed to secure for the season, they were enabled, clad in the most coquettish of bathing costumes, to take headers and swim to their hearts' content. Mrs. Torneywayne and Phyllis and Dora had learned swimming when they were at school together and were all proficients in the art, though possibly for finish and swiftness the eldest of the three was the most accomplished. Occasionally they were joined by some of their girl friends who happened to be staying in the neighbourhood, but usually they had the secluded creek entirely to themselves.

Guy and Ralph were undoubtedly missing a great deal of fun, for, owing to the Colonel having lent his house-boat to some friends at a certain date, there was a definite limit to his stay, and arrangements were already being made for continuing the trip by water. Dora, who quickly picked anything up, soon became skilful in managing a sailing boat, and she and Phyllis often made trips up and down in the dinghy. Then there were all sorts of excursions and entertainments organized by their friends in neighbouring house-boats. One

day there was a picnic in the neighbourhood of Hambleden Lock, another there was a tea-party on Buck Ait; there were luncheons at Medmenham, at Wargrave, and at Henley; there were drives in the waggonette to Harpsden, to Twyford, and other pleasant places in the neighbourhood.

In addition to all this there were dreamy afternoons in punts, and there were delightful lazy mornings paddling in the canoe or running the nose of the aforesaid craft into the rushes in some secluded backwater and dreaming over the volume of some favourite author, and there were moonlight excursions when they were able to thoroughly enjoy and appreciate the tender poetry of still summer night.



"DREAMING OVER THE VOLUME OF SOME FAVOURITE AUTHOR."

## CHAPTER FOURTEENTH — *A GOOD TIME*

> *"The dear delightful dreaming on those splendid summer days,*
> *The loving and the laughing and the lotos-eating laze!"*
>
> CAROLS IN CLOVER.

"WELL, better late than never. Read this, Child," said the Colonel, as he handed a letter to his wife one morning at the breakfast table. Auntie glanced at it, gave a flash with her pretty brown eyes, and passed it to Phyllis. Phyllis smiled and gave it to Dora, who blushed very prettily, then pouted, and crushed up the letter and threw it to her uncle. It was a note from Stillmere announcing the return of the deserters. Mrs. Torneywayne openly proclaimed she was delighted, the two girls were really very much pleased, but they affected a supreme indifference, and Uncle Jack's countenance betokened he was well content; but he added, what silly fools those chappies were not to have come earlier.

Though both girls said that it would altogether spoil the placidness of their daily existence, and agreed that they hated anything or anybody which interfered with the usual course of their lives, their aunt smiled to herself when she found Phyllis taking especial pains with the *menu*, and was amused when Tatters told her that "Miss Feyton was so particular and that difficult to please that she didn't know whether there'd be any dinner at all." Besides this, Auntie did not fail to notice that Dora annexed the best of the cut flowers, and that she was engaged nearly all the morning in decorating the bachelors' quarters in the tender.

They were all up at the station to meet the afternoon train, and when Guy and Ralph emerged from the carriage they thought they had never seen a prettier picture—not even a somewhat similar presentment which they remembered seeing framed in foliage behind the canal wall in Trewsbury Mead—than the three ladies all in white, and wearing bunches of red roses.

The Colonel, too, in his white flannel suit, with his snow-white moustache looking whiter than ever against his sunburnt complexion, seemed to be in better spirits than ever, and it

did the two young men good to receive his warm welcome, and to hear once more the genuine and ringing tone of his hearty laugh. There was no mistaking Mrs. Torneywayne's delight at seeing the truants once more. This cordiality proved to be infectious, and the two girls quickly abandoned their reserve and welcomed the deserters as old friends. Probably it would be difficult to discover a merrier party than those who took their way, laughing and chattering beneath the chequered shade of the avenue, in the direction of the *Snail.*

The dinner that evening was a great success. They had it early because they wished to go out on the water afterwards. The way in which Dora had decorated that round table showed she not only possessed considerable artistic perception, but had thoroughly put her heart into the work. The flowers were arranged to perfection, and she had skilfully utilized some of her uncle's old rowing cups and tankards. The Colonel had a niece on each side of him and his wife opposite, and though it was not especially arranged, when they were all seated it was found that Guy was seated beside Phyllis and Ralph next

Dora. No one objected to this, for it seemed to be a very natural and harmonious arrangement. Most certainly Phyllis had quite outdone herself with regard to the dinner, and was greatly complimented thereupon, and Tatters, who wore an especially smart cap for the occasion, beamed with delight as she handed the various dishes, and took half the credit of the entertainment to herself.

"I have read somewhere," said the Colonel, "that a girl who could waltz and make melted butter equally well is as near perfection as possible, but *I* say that a girl who can sing like Phyllis and, like Phyllis, make a salad as good as this deserves to have a statue, a testimonial, the riband and cross of a new order of merit, which should especially be devoted to all who cultivate womanly grace and usefulness and accomplishment, and from which anything approaching that modern horror the New Woman should be especially excluded."

The Colonel's sentiments on this subject were cordially re-echoed, and when the three men were taking their post-prandial smoke on the roof beneath the awning afterwards, they all agreed that the dinner was admirable. It

was a dinner of a few dishes; it was simple and unostentatious, but everything was in its way perfect. The Colonel went on to say to his guests that he regretted very much that they had been compelled to tarry so long in town, as, having lent the *Snail* to some friends, he would be obliged shortly to quit it and continue the journey by water, and he would be so glad if they would help him down with the boat, if they had nothing better to do. Both Stillmere and Claymer heartily accepted the invitation, and they all proceeded to plan out the remainder of the expedition, the Colonel mentioning several places where they felt bound to call and possibly stay the night on their way down. Presently coffee is served beneath the awning by Tatters, and subsequently they are joined by the ladies.

"What a lovely evening it is," said Mrs. Torneywayne. "It really is the most perfect summer night we've had throughout the trip."

"Yes, it seems to be especially turned on for the benefit of the deserters," said the Colonel, indicating Guy and Ralph with a wave of his cigar.

"It's a great deal more than they deserve," said his wife. "I've not forgiven them yet.

I might forgive them, Jack, if they will consent to stick to the ship for the rest of the journey."

"Good," said the Colonel. "Then they are forgiven, for they have already promised to do so."

"Well, I am delighted. You will cheer us up, for I was beginning to be afraid our expedition was getting a little bit dull."

"No, it's anything but dull, Auntie," said Dora.

"Who would be dull with you, Auntie, and Uncle Jack?" said Phyllis, taking his hand.

"Well, you've given our two friends a nice task, I must say," said the Colonel, "not only several days' hard physical exertion, but also to undertake a severe mental strain in endeavouring to raise the spirits of a depressed Darby-and-Joan company, already somewhat weary of one another's society ——"

"Well, they can't get out of it now, at any rate," said Mrs. Torneywayne, "so it's no use discussing it any further. But what I came up here to propose was, as it is such a lovely night, that we should go for a gentle paddle in the moonlight. Phyllis will take her guitar ——"

"No, Auntie, please," said Phyllis, pouting, and looking rebellious.

"How dare you, Miss, disobey your aunt? When I was a little girl and disobeyed my aunt I know what my fate was. Talk about rebellious daughters, indeed! They're nothing to insubordinate nieces. Don't answer me, Phyllis. You will take your guitar and you will sing your new song. I feel in a sentimental mood to-night. I almost feel as if I were in love with your Uncle Jack; the soft air of the sweet summer night, the moonlight, the glitter of the water, and the faint rustle of the leaves make me feel quite romantic. The scenery is in accord with my disposition, and your song would harmonize with my mood ——"

"Well, Phyl, my dear," said the Colonel, "I think we had better obey. Your auntie has made a long speech, and when she makes a long speech I always give in, in case she might make a longer one. Dora, pipe all hands to get the punt ready."

And Dora laughed and blew her boatswain's whistle; they trooped down the ladder, and were presently all aboard the punt, with plenty of spare cushions and a good accompaniment of shawls and wraps in case it might come on damp or chilly—you can never be

certain when this may occur in the Thames Valley—and were soon drifting out into the glorious moonlight. By common consent all thought of exertion was abandoned. Everyone lazily disposed themselves in comfortable attitudes on cushions, and Dora found herself by some extraordinary chance sitting next to Ralph.

Though she had not forgiven him, and was by no means certain how far his flirtation had gone with Flo Furleigh, though she still thought he might be, and probably was, engaged to that young lady, everything for the moment seemed to be so pleasant; there seemed to be such a harmony of sound and of colour and general good feeling pervading the scene and the atmosphere that she had neither the heart nor the energy to disturb it with wordy warfare. Miss Dora was one of those sensible little persons who always enjoyed the passing moment to the fullest, and never spoiled her enjoyment by thinking what might happen on the morrow. And so she lay in her cushioned nest, she closed her eyes for a moment and then she opened them again and gazed upon the deep dark blue of the sky, the shimmer of the moonlight, and heard the low

rustle of the reeds and the faint flutter of the foliage.

She gazed shyly up and noted Ralph's handsome profile clearly defined against the clear, dark sky; then it was for a moment brilliantly illuminated as he lit his cigarette. He turned suddenly round as if he were about to say something, and then she heard her aunt say—

"Well, play something first, Phyllis!"

It was a treat, after the perpetual fourth-rate banjo tinkling we experience in the present day, to hear Miss Feyton play the guitar. She was an accomplished proficient on the banjo, but such guitar playing as hers was rarely to be found out of professional circles. Indeed, even there you could seldom hear such poetic improvization as Phyllis could produce when she was exactly in the humour. To-night she happened to be at her best.

She began by some grand and harmonious manipulations of the strings that effectually fixed the attention of her audience; then she drifted into a lively *bolero*, so lightly played that it seemed to be in the dim distance; then this became merged into a dignified *spagnoletta*, interpreted with admirable taste; then she

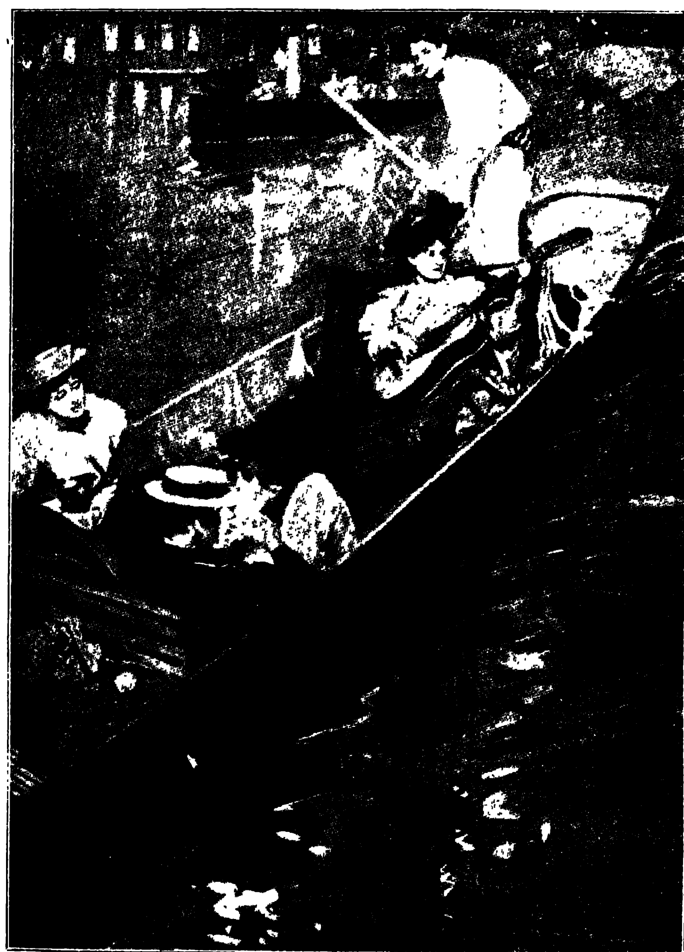
strayed into the paraphrase of a popular music-hall song, from which she seemed to extract all its beauty and to entirely disguise its poverty; then a quaint old English ditty was lovingly rendered; then a sparkling French *chansonnette* peeped in, so to speak, for a moment, subsequently giving way to a delicious little bit of Dibdin.

Presently she introduced "Down in a flow'ry vale," which caused Ralph to look at Guy, and Guy to wonder where she heard it, and both to marvel at the delightful rendering of Costanzo Festa's melody of three hundred years ago. Finally she wandered into a quaint minor key, which enthralled her listeners; she seemed to fashion it, to mould it, to interpret it in every kind of language, and to present it in all kinds of disguises.

They scarcely knew whether it was tenderly sorrowful or touchingly sweet. Probably it was both. It gradually died away, and the company did not know the improvization was at an end till they saw Phyllis put down her guitar.

"Thank you, dear!" said her aunt.

And a murmur of delight seemed to pervade the boat, but the audience had been too much touched to applaud noisily.



"GAZED UPON THE DEEP DARK B

It took some little time before the conversation became general again. The Colonel wondered what the time was. His wife said it didn't matter, as it would be a pity to go in yet as it was such a lovely night, and remarked this drifting was so delicious.

"But," she added, "you haven't sung yet, Phyl. We're not going to let you off like that. Let us have one, just one, dear, before we go back."

"Yes, I will, Auntie. I'll sing something short and appropriate. It shall be 'Drifting down.'" And with a wondrous prelude on the guitar, which seemed to thrill them all, she began—

Drifting down in the grey-green twilight,
  Oh, the scent of the new-mown hay!
The oars drip in the mystic shy light,
  Oh, the charm of the dying day!

While fading flecks of bright opalescence
  But faintly dapple a saffron sky,
The stream flows on with superb quiescence,
  The breeze is hushed to the softest sigh.

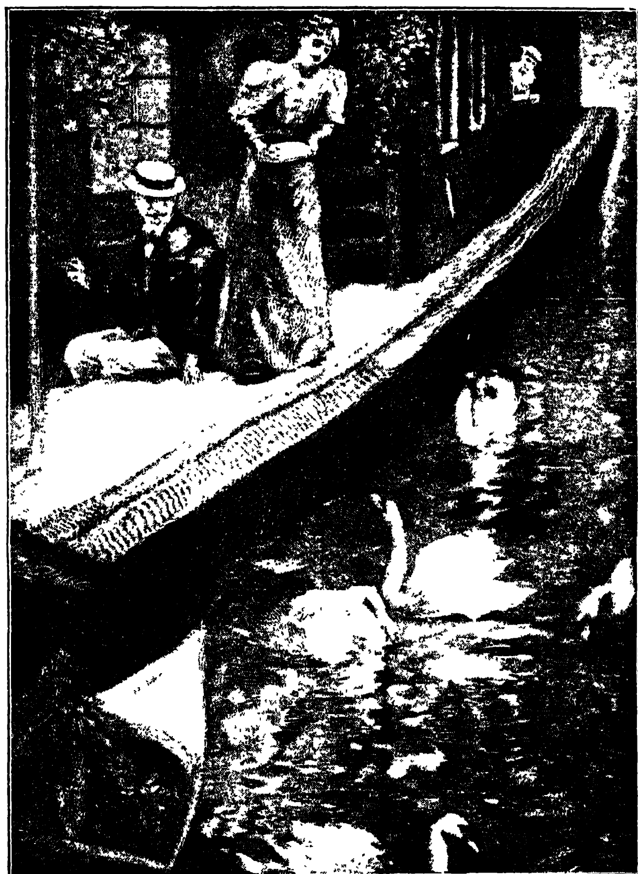
Drifting down in the sweet still weather,
  Oh, how short is the summer day!
Love, my Love, when we drift together,
  Oh, how quickly we drift away!

During this song they found they had

drifted further than they intended, and were surprised to find themselves below the Ferry, and approaching the outskirts of the Park Place grounds, so they put the punt round and quietly paddled up through the Bolney Backwater. It was a memorable evening, and long after Stillmere and Claymer had turned into their comfortable berths in the tender did they lie awake thinking of it. And possibly there were pleasant fancies that haunted the slumbers of Phyllis and Dora in the neighbouring boat. Who knows?

Mighty pleasant did the two young men find the few remaining days aboard the *Snail*, and the two girls found the advent of their former *compagnons de voyage* by no means distasteful. It is true that Flo Furleigh — who was still staying in the neighbourhood—irritated Dora not a little, and she was still unable to understand why Claymer had any sympathy with such a little flirt. And yet there was something about the girl that she liked. Sometimes she was very friendly with her, and it was only when Ralph came upon the scene that her original dislike revived.

One day especially was to be remembered.



"MIGHTY PLEASANT DID THEY FIND THE FEW REMAINING DAYS

They all went up in the punt, towing the two canoes, to Sonning to luncheon. Phyllis was anxious to try her powers as a puntress, and Stillmere had promised to give her some instruction in the art. They had started early—every one started early with whom the Colonel had anything to do—and so they had the best of a glorious morning. It, however, soon became very hot, and Phyllis found she grew tired and had had enough of a somewhat weighty cargo before they reached Shiplake Lock, and resigned the pole to Stillmere. Fortunately they had a tow-line on board, and Claymer was presently harnessed, who took them leisurely along to the White Hart. Here they had an early luncheon, for which every one had a fine appetite, and more than one of the crew managed to do ample justice to "a cut of cold beef and a prime Cheddar cheese and a tankard of bitter at Sonning." Afterwards they spent a pleasant time gossiping in the garden and admiring the splendid show of roses, which happened to be in their prime.

They subsequently started with the intention of exploring Patrick's stream and reaching home that way.

"Darby and Joan," said the Colonel, "will go in the punt. Letters have arrived from headquarters this morning relative to the appointment of a new governess for infantry that require serious discussion, and we must not be interrupted by the irresponsible chatter of boys and girls. You boys and girls must bring the canoes down. Come along, Joan!"

And wondrous pretty, strikingly youthful, did "Joan" look as she lolled back on the tan-tinted cushions and curled her slim figure in the corner of the punt and flashed her brown eyes over a lapful of roses she carried in her simple girlish frock. One might almost have fancied that the governess was required for herself instead of the "infantry" over which the Colonel was pleased to make merry. A most delightful picture did that punt and its cargo make as Uncle Jack leisurely shoved his craft down stream.

"I should like to have auntie's portrait painted just as she sits there," said Phyllis. "She looks exactly as she used to look at school. I never knew any one vary as she does in appearance. This morning she is looking her very best. Now, *what* a subject that would be for George Leslie!"

"Exactly the man I was going to name," said Stillmere.

Without any previous arrangement, but coming quite naturally, as a matter of course, Phyllis was in Guy's canoe, and Dora accompanied Ralph. The first couple got well away before the second started, for Claymer caused some delay by going to the landlord and begging a bunch of roses, which he gave to Dora. Dora was looking her very best as she sat under her white sunshade in the canoe. Master Ralph thought he knew of another excellent subject for George Leslie, and, though he did not say so, there is but little doubt he looked his thoughts. Dora was supremely happy, and did not allow even a passing thought of "that horrid Flo Furleigh" to mar her enjoyment.

Those who know Patrick's stream are well aware that it requires the most careful navigation, and that those unacquainted with its shoals, shallows, and snags are likely to come to terrible grief. The Colonel knew it intimately, and therefore he did not take long before his craft emerged into the Loddon, and subsequently into the Thames below Shiplake Lock. But as for Stillmere and Claymer, they

proved, according to all accounts, to be very inexperienced pilots. Long after the punt had returned to the *Snail* did the canoe containing Phyllis and Guy arrive, and it was a considerable time subsequently that Dora and Ralph hove in sight. The difficulties of navigation, the set of the current, the shoals and the shallows of Patrick's stream, were freely discussed over the dinner-table that evening. There was a merry twinkle in the Colonel's eye when he said, "It was a dangerous place for the inexperienced."

Notwithstanding all the dangers, the four intrepid voyagers came to the conclusion that their lesson in navigation in Patrick's stream was one of the pleasantest experiences of the trip.

## CHAPTER FIFTEENTH — *A CAPITAL CREW*

> *"From sunny Shiplake then, past Henley town,*
> *They land at Marlow e'er the sun goes down."*
>
> RANDAN RHYMES.

IT was not many days after the episode related in the last chapter took place that sailing orders were given, and one fine morning the *Otter* was once more under weigh. Weatherbrow and Tattersea were left in charge to receive the coming guests, and they both looked rather sad as the merry party said good-bye to them and subsequently pulled at a good swinging pace down stream.

There had been mutiny amid what the Colonel called the better half of the crew, headed by his wife. The men were not allowed to row at all. Phyllis gave them a long steady stroke, her aunt pulling the sculls, which she handled with marvellous dexterity, and Dora bow. It would be difficult to find a prettier crew anywhere or one better up to

its work. So thought the Colonel as he exchanged glances with Sculls, so thought Guy as he gazed upon Stroke, so thought Ralph as he occasionally caught the eye of Bow. The Colonel steered, Stillmere was beside him, and Claymer sat on the floor.

And so they sped onward, listening to "the rhythm of the rowlock and the music of the oar," leaving the pleasant colony of floating habitations behind them. Past the various eyots and creeks that they knew so well, past the may-bush that the Colonel told them he saw Vicat Cole painting one fine morning, past Bolney Ferry, past the picturesque boat-house of Park Place and the glorious wooded pleasaunce above it, and eventually past Flo Furleigh in a canoe looking very lazy and pretty, and young Caverner paddling her. Dora at first bit her lips, and then, thinking she was going away, and moreover, Ralph was going too, smiled her sweetest smile and kissed her hand. It was enthusiastically returned by Flo, her companion raised his hat, and Dora lost sight of them—she trusted for ever—as the *Otter* passed into Marsh Lock.

The ladies still stuck to their work bravely. They passed to the right of the eyot and waved

adieux to various friends on house-boats there anchored. Some of these craft dipped their ensigns and others hailed them through speaking-trumpets or blew hideous salutes on "syrens." On they went, past the Royal, past the Angel, under picturesque Henley Bridge, and past the Red Lion, with its luxuriant wistaria and its brilliant strip of flower-decked lawn.

The whole party evinced a desire to stay here and lounge through the morning. The place seemed so quiet and deserted, looking as if half the inhabitants had gone away for a holiday and the rest were sleeping in the sunshine. Phyllis rested upon her oar, and sang in a delightful undertone—

When athletes are weary, and hushed is the riot,
  When launches have vanished and house-boats have gone;
When Henley once more is delightfully quiet,
  'Tis soothing to muse on the Red Lion lawn!

When the swans hold their own and the sedges scarce shiver,
  As sweet summer breezes most tunefully sigh—
Let us laze at the ruddy-faced Inn by the river,
  For Henley is restful in dreamy July!

"And we're not going to laze here after all, Uncle Jack?" she asked, shaking her head at him.

"No, my dear Phyl, I only wish we could. Ah! what good times I have had at that 'ruddy-faced inn by the river!'"

And then he indulges in recollections of the merry evenings spent in Mrs. Williams's parlour, and tells them all about the noted people who used to frequent it, gives them the account of the wonderful grey parrot that always insisted upon joining in the conversation, and informs them how Henley Regatta has increased in volume and popularity in recent years.

"Why, when I first came up to it as a boy," he continued, "there wasn't a single steam-launch or house-boat on the course. And I can tell you something more remarkable than this. I was talking to a well-known judge the other day, and he said when he first attended the Regatta, except the contending crews and the umpire's boat, there wasn't a single person on the water. They all stood on the banks or sat in their carriages on the bridge."

"What house is that, Uncle Jack?" said Phyllis, looking to her right.

"That? Why that ought to be your house, inasmuch as it is Phyllis Court. It has one of the most lovely old river walls I know

anywhere. I should like it to have been painted by Millais in his 'Huguenot' period. Now, on my right you'll see Remenham Lodge; the mansion on the other side is Fawley Court. Mr. Mackenzie has some wonderful pictures of the early regattas. Just opposite you'll see Remenham village. Shall I tell you about Saint Nicholas Church? Ask auntie, she'll tell you all about it. The recollection is too painful for me."

Auntie, however, declined to be drawn; she frowned and shook her head and bit her lips, but at the same time her pretty brown eyes gleamed marvellously, and presently she smiled very sweetly and pulled her sculls more vigorously than ever.

Now they leave Regatta Island, with its classic temple, on the right, the Colonel lamenting the decay of some fine old trees that used to add to its picturesqueness. Anon they pass by Greenlands, Lady Hambleden's pleasant mansion, and look with admiration on the velvety lawns and the brilliant parterres. Then, noting the flat, cattle-decked pastures on the opposite side, they presently pass into Hambleden Lock.

Here the Colonel tells them that he and a

friend of his once worked this lock for a whole day, and mightily he enjoyed it. "It gave you," he said, "as fine an opportunity for studying character as you might have had in old days from keeping a turnpike, or in modern times by presiding at a post office." At this lock some friends came down to bid them good-bye, and as they had to wait a considerable time for incoming boats, they all got out and chatted by the side of the lock.

They were not in any particular hurry, so the Colonel proposed they should take a stroll about the lock and its neighbourhood, and finding a man he knew there he sent him in charge of the *Otter* to Aston to await their arrival. It is a mightily pleasant place to spend a dreamy, do-nothing morning at, is Hambleden Lock. There is a singular fascination about all the Thames locks and weirs, and possibly Hambleden is one of the most attractive. Though it may not be quite so picturesque as it was with the ancient moss-o'ergrown posts and creaky gates and dilapidated timbers that it possessed years ago, its restoration has been cunningly accomplished, and it possesses less of the element of newness and blatant spick-and-spansion that may be

found in many of the modern locks both above and below. You will find plenty to occupy your attention if you please

To muse while the water is ebbing and flowing,
To silently smoke and serenely take stock,
Of countless Thames toilers, now coming, now going,
Who take a pink ticket at Hambleden Lock!

Its surroundings, too, are replete with pictures. If you stroll along the pathway over the weir to the mill and listen to the rushing waters, if you gaze upon the gay garden surrounding the lock-keeper's house, if you lounge at the lock gates and watch the various craft and their passengers passing up and down, you will get a riverside picture gallery that will give you untold delight, and you will be surprised how a morning will fly away while you appear to be pleasantly doing nothing amid the pleasantest of surroundings.

Of course, if you are disposed to wander further afield, you can have an agreeable stroll up the valley of the Hamble to the village of Hambleden, take note of the ancient manor-house and its quaint garden, visit the church, inspect the monument of Sir Cope d'Oyley and his ten children, and the curious headstone in the graveyard bearing the still more curious

name of Barabee Fastnedge. Our friends, with all their easy methods of voyaging, had hardly time to do this, but they passed an enjoyable time round and about the lock, and then, crossing over, strolled quietly down the right bank in the direction of Aston.

"I am inclined to think this is one of my favourite spots on the Thames," said the Colonel. "It seems to be a sort of compendium of the characteristics of the river. Indeed, one of the best of our Thames artists, C. J. Lewis, lived both here and at Aston for several seasons, and I think there is no artist who has more successfully imbued his pictures with such distinct Thames flavour. Some of his out-of-door studies painted round and about this quarter are, I think, finer than anything that has ever been done in this especial line."

They had wandered and mooned so long at the lock that they found they had not time to walk up to the Flower Pot, so they embarked at the Ferry, the ladies insisting upon rowing as before. Very pleasant does the prospect become as they proceed, and view the high ground on the right, with the fine old mansion of Culham Court and the rich pastures on the left, ever varied by the brilliant groups of

picturesquely placed cattle. The stream now curves to the left past Magpie Island, and presently they round another corner and come in sight of Medmenham Abbey.

"Our crew say they are all exhausted, and must stay here for luncheon," said the Colonel.

"Nonsense, Jack, we are only just getting into our work," said Mrs. Torneywayne.

"Easy all!" replied the Colonel, as he steered for the landing-stage. "Ship sculls. In, bow. Back, stroke! Well rowed all! Very sorry, Child, to put a damper on your enthusiasm, but if we're to have luncheon at all, it must be here. I think Mortimer Collins sings somewhere—

Rowing men, when the sun comes to redden 'em,
  And summer is soft o'er the leas,
Are fond of the Abbey at Medmenham,
  With which Mrs. Bitmead agrees!

Probably we shall find the same notion prevalent among merry young water-girls, and though Mrs. Bitmead has long ceased to keep a hostelry in these parts, I have little doubt that the present proprietor of the Ferry Hotel will have views in harmony with hers."

They found the Colonel was not far wrong

in his idea on these subjects, and every one was ready for the excellent luncheon provided. Afterwards they sat on the lawn, and wandered round the old Abbey, and watched the arrivals and departures from the landing-stage. Referring to the well-known motto of the Mock Monks of Medmenham, *Fay ce que voudras*, the Colonel said—

"I remember Mortimer Collins wrote some clever verses about that. You know his poems, don't you, Claymer?"

"I'm ashamed to say, Colonel," replied Ralph, "I've never seen the book!"

Dora looked straight at him, and he did not wince or even change colour under her searching gaze.

"Well, I never!" she said to herself. "I call him a downright, barefaced, brazen cheat!"

She, however, had no opportunity of pursuing the subject further, for they were soon afloat again, the men once more rowing and Mrs. Torneywayne at the helm, who piloted them most successfully past Danesfield woods and the troubled waters that tumble over Hurley Weir, and, skilfully avoiding all the dangerous rapids in that neighbourhood, brought them safely into the still haven of

Hurley Lock. Very pleasant is Hurley Lock, and very quaint is Hurley village if you have time to visit it, and very picturesque are the ivy-grown and crumbling walls of Lady Place.

"Now, tell us all about Lady Place, Jack," said his wife. "I know you stopped there when you were a boy, and you used to play at hide-and-seek in the cellars ——"

"And they used to keep up Christmas in the real old style," continued Dora.

"And there was a long oak corridor hung with mistletoe, and a lot of pretty girls whom you used to kiss under it," added Phyllis.

"My dear Child, my beloved nieces—who ever, I observe, follow the bad example of a misguided aunt—*I* never saw Lady Place in its original splendour! Lady Place was demolished long before I was born. I never saw it in any way different to what you see it now ——"

"Then you're a fraud, Jack. You're always pretending you can recollect things that nobody else can. And here, when we want some especial information, you break down. If you ever venture to publish your 'Reminiscences' I'll review them."

"I fancy," said the Colonel, "the 'Reminiscences' would not go beyond one volume, which would be thus concluded with a note by the editor, 'Here a promising and brilliant career was cut short by marriage, and little was subsequently heard of one of the most remarkable men of our time.'"

"Or," said Phyllis, "'he subsequently embarked in commercial speculations. Among them may be mentioned the Thames Trout Company, the Barlow Society for improving the mental condition of the masses, which may both be remembered as among the most notable failures within our recollection——'"

"Or," said the Colonel, "'his remaining years were embittered by the ungrateful conduct of two nieces——'"

"Auntie," said Dora, in the bow, "don't take any notice of him, but just look back at the view."

Miss Daynflete was quite right to call her aunt's attention to the prospect, for, after getting clear of the island below the lock, you have a very pretty peep of Harleyford. As you get further down, near the Ferry, Temple House, with its well-treed grounds and gardens, may be seen on the right. Bearing away sharp to

the left, they pass into Temple Lock, and the Colonel says he remembers the time when this lock was worked by a pretty young lass whom they christened "Undine, of the Temple Lock."

Once through the lock, you come into a bit of swift water, and it is well worth while to look back at the pretty picture made by the combination of the Temple Mills, the tree-decked island, and the fall of water. On the right may be seen the Grange and Bisham Abbey, and in the background Inky Down Wood, joining Fultness Wood, which eventually develops into the richly-timbered hill, Quarry Woods, reaching some miles below Marlow.

Picturesque All Saints' Church and the vicarage are next in view, and then, catching a glimpse of the spire of Marlow Church, Court Garden, and some pleasant villas on the left, they run under the suspension bridge and land at the Complete Angler.

## CHAPTER SIXTEENTH — *FISHING AND FLIRTATION*

> " *While learning to angle, 'tis pleasant to hear*
> *Sweet words whispered low to the song of the weir!*"
>
> THE DISCREET RYPECK.

LONG before the suspension bridge which here crosses the river was erected, the Complete Angler is said to have been a going concern, and though its accommodation has been increased of late years, it still retains its old-fashioned characteristics, and yet remains a typical riverside inn.

The Colonel, however, remembered it when it was about half the size it is at present. He recollected the ancient green eel-box by the waterside; he knew the old black retriever, was acquainted with the curious old Swiss waiter whom Mr. George Leslie mentions, and had many anecdotes to tell of the excellent Mrs. Parslow, a majestic lady who at one time owned this hostelry. He also had something to say of a notable supper in this hotel

after the Eton boys had been victorious at one of the Henley Regattas of past years. All these things he discoursed upon as the three men walked up and down the lawn and smoked.

"I don't know whether the bathing here is the same as it used to be years ago," said the Colonel, "but I know that it formerly was about the best to be had on the Thames. You used to be able to take a punt below the weir and paddle close up to it. There was a certain point where you could step on the apron of the weir, grasp a rymer in each hand, and have every variety of douche all over you."

"What a good idea!" remarked Ralph.

"It was a curious sensation," continued the Colonel, "gazing from the level of the river on the banks and houses beyond and having the stream sweeping down upon you. It seemed to invigorate every muscle, and make you tingle and glow all over. This, what I may call stream-shampooing, was infinitely more enjoyable than a Turkish bath, and always appeared to me to be twice as beneficial. Its therapeutic effects were surprising, and have never yet been sufficiently recognised."

"Splendid!" ejaculated Guy.

"And then," continued the Colonel, "when you were tired of being rasped by the river, you jumped into the punt once more, walked to the other end and took a header into about thirty feet of water. My word! it was delicious. You went down, down, down, and felt you could go down for ever, till it suddenly struck you that you would be late for breakfast, so you elevated your hands, you saw the colour of the water change, its dismal darkness become a sun-illumined celadon, you saw the silver bubbles on the surface, and you emerged into bright daylight and a glorious atmosphere."

"Excellent!" said Ralph. "Why, Colonel, here's another undeveloped industry. The 'Marlow Cure' ought to be a tremendous success."

"Of course it ought," replied the Colonel, "if it were properly floated as a company ——

"What, another new company?" asked Mrs. Torneywayne, who just then joined them, with Phyllis and Dora. "I wonder what will become of me and my two little girls?"

"Don't you be silly, Child. This is a real good thing. The 'Marlow Cure' would only be the beginning of a vast scheme which

would bring unbounded prosperity to the entire Thames Valley."

"Yes," said Phyllis, with a laugh. "Has not a certain singer foreshadowed this great scheme in rhyme?"

"How, my dear Phyl?"

"Why, don't you recollect, Uncle, the lines—

So when no longer London life
  You feel you can endure;
Just quit its noise, its whirl, its strife,
  And try the 'Marlow Cure!'
You'll smooth the wrinkles on your brow,
  And scare aware each frown,
Feel young again once more, I vow,
  At quaint old Marlow town!"

"Capital, Phyllis; we'll use that in our advertisements. But our company won't be confined to Marlow. We shall have 'cures' at every place on the Thames where there is a weir. Depend upon it, the Stream Shampooing Company, the River Rasping Company, the Weir Washing Company, or whatever we elect to call it, will prove one of the greatest successes of modern times ——"

"But suppose people don't take it up, Jack?" said his wife.

"My dear Child, they're bound to take it up. Have some clever articles written upon

it by doctors in popular periodicals; get up a controversy about it in the daily papers; publish a pamphlet with letters from people who have been cured—or who fancy they have been cured, which is the same thing—of all sorts of maladies, and the thing is done."

"Once start the thing," said Guy, "and everybody will patronise it, the same as they do golf or cycling——"

"Yes," replied the Colonel, "all the old glories of Tunbridge Wells, Cheltenham, Leamington, Bath, and other places would be revived on the Thames, and all the money that is annually squandered on foreign cures would be spent in England. Come along, boys, and let us make a preliminary inspection of the weir——"

"Ah! do, Jack," said Mrs. Torneywayne. "Don't be late for dinner, and *do* leave us for a while in peace, that we may quietly enjoy this pleasant prospect."

Auntie was not so far wrong in her notion that this view is one that should be quietly and peacefully enjoyed. The lawn of the Complete Angler is another of the delightful Thames haunts where it is mighty pleasant to lounge and chat and do nothing, with the

comforting consciousness that you are doing it thoroughly.

Gazing straight across the river you have the prospect that Frederick Walker has gracefully idealized in his well-known picture of "Marlow Ferry." Further on do you have a glimpse of the pleasant villas bordering the way to the lock, and right away to the left do you see the varied tints of the luxuriant foliage clothing Quarry Woods.

Below is the stream, rushing, seething, and boiling, lashing through the sluices, tumbling over the weir, swirling between the rymers, eddying around the willow-grown isles, sweeping over the shallows, in a hurry to get away from the artificial cut to the lock, and apparently in a greater hurry to join it some distance below.

There is a marvellous music about Marlow Weir. It is wondrous soothing, indescribably comforting, to smoke a lazy pipe and listen to it. There is a joyous note, with a sweet undercurrent of sadness in a minor key, that is singularly fascinating, and at the same time thrillingly touching.

And when, from time to time, the musical bells ring out from All Saints' Church, you

enjoy a rare harmony that is difficult to describe, and would appear to be beyond the grasp of the most subtle of musical notators. A lingering lullaby, a soothful song, a peaceful poem, a comforting cantata—call it what you will—it is impossible to deny the fascination of the music of Marlow Weir.

Oh, muse for a while by the tossing tide—
  'Tis good to ponder, and moon, and dream
Where the dimpled waters curve and glide
  To ceaseless song of the swirling stream!
When to-day seems gone, and the past seems near—
  As thoughts revert unto bygone times—
While the sweet sad music of Marlow Weir
  Is gaily gladdened by Marlow Chimes!

The foam flies fast as the flood runs by;
  The ripples redden with gleam of sun;
The sun sinks low and the saffron sky
  To twilight deepens—the day is done!
While the lightsome laughter of yester year,
  The poem of youth, with its reckless rhymes,
Seems mingled with music of Marlow Weir,
  And finds an echo in Marlow Chimes!

Whether it was the music of the weir, or the pleasant town, or the varied walks in the neighbourhood it is difficult to say, but the whole party found a singular fascination about Great Marlow, and instead of passing only one night at the Complete Angler, they remained

there for some days. During this period Phyllis took lessons in punting, and Guy was her preceptor. They found an excellent light punt; they used to take Mrs. Torneywayne as passenger, and went out nearly every morning, and became well acquainted with the pretty stretch of water between the bridge and Temple Lock.

Phyllis was an apt pupil, and under Guy's instruction she soon handled the punt-pole with ease and dexterity. The exercise suited her well, and her graceful figure appeared to singular advantage as she caused her light craft to speed with wondrous exactness through the waters.

'Tis pleasant on the Thames to laze
On sweet unclouded summer days,
When punt propelled, on water-ways,
By subtle skill is:
Thrice pleasant when we're sped along
In cushioned ease—with merry song—
By Phyllis!

Her hands are shapely, dimpled, tanned,
Her sailor-hat 's down tilted and
Half-hidden in its scarlet band
A white swan-quill is:
Her sleeves are furled, her frock is pink,
No puntress looks so nice, I think,
As Phyllis!

Despite a dignity of mien,
A russet shoe may now be seen,
And then 'neath fluttered frock, I ween,
        A snowy frill is:
But, O, the undulating grace!
The charm of figure and of face
        Of Phyllis!

Behold the maiden standing there,
Who grasps her pole with skilful care,
And shows us what—with queenly air—
        Her power of will is:
Though breezes blow, though stream runs strong,
There's none can send this craft along
        Like Phyllis!

But yet come moments still more blest;
The pole is shipped: in cushioned nest
The damsel takes a well-earned rest—
        The breeze so still is:
Delightful then to muse and dream,
And thus go drifting down the stream
        With Phyllis!

As for Dora she developed a great taste for angling. Her uncle was nominally her professor, and he daily was supposed to superintend her studies in a punt, but it would appear that Uncle Jack was somewhat lazy, that he devoted his attention more to his newspaper or book, and delegated the greater part of his professional duties to Ralph.

The last-named gentleman speedily became transformed into a species of Izaak Walton, and his enthusiasm with regard to angling knew no bounds. Dora, too, it must be allowed, was becoming marvellously learned on the subject, and forgot how she used to sneer at the calm, contemplative people she had seen patiently waiting for a bite on the bank or in a punt, only a few days ago. She was very sanguine of her success, and looked forward to securing one of those monsters that may be seen duly preserved and varnished in big glass cases at various riverside taverns up and down the Thames in the present day.

Uncle Jack, expert and veteran fisherman as he was, used often to smile behind his paper to hear Claymer laying down the law on a subject with which he evidently had but a superficial acquaintance. He was amused at the confidential consultations the two had with regard to bait, the masterful manner assumed by Ralph, and how heads came very close together occasionally and hands sometimes touched, of course quite by accident, in getting some of the finer parts of the tackle into order; and he chuckled to himself when Dora ran the hook into her finger and

Ralph tore his handkerchief in shreds to bind it up.

He was very kind and patient was Uncle Jack; he did not even grumble when his niece in her enthusiasm put a hook into his ear and struck with unusual energy. He did not, however, think Miss Dora could catch many fish, but he laughed to himself, regarding Claymer attentively, and wondered how he would look in a glass case, properly arranged, adequately varnished, and duly labelled as an evidence of the skill of Miss Daynflete.

This notion so tickled the Colonel that the two anglers saw his paper violently agitated; they then saw those broad shoulders shaking, and presently there was a peal of laughter that rang through the music of the weir.

"Uncle Jack," said Dora, "what *are* you laughing at? You'll frighten all the fish! There! I had a bite then, and he's gone. I wish you wouldn't ——"

"Perhaps he'll be back again. Probably he's a bit shy. No doubt he's on the nibble. You don't strike quick enough, my dear Dora ——"

"Well, Uncle, I don't see anything to laugh at," replied Dora, with a pout, seeing her uncle



"THE TWO ANGLERS SAW HIS PAPER VIOLENTLY AGITATED."

was going off again, "you *are* a silly man. *Do* be quiet!"

"Ha! ha! ha! I can't help laughing, my dear. Ho! ho! ho! He! he! he! But this article is so wonderfully clever and amusing."

Dora turned her back on him, having a vague idea that he was laughing at *her*, and shrugged her shoulders; then she said she was feeling cold, and the noise of the weir made her feel "buzzy," and it was time to go in.

Altogether she was not best pleased. She was put out with herself and everybody else, she scarcely knew why. More vexation, however, was in store for her, for on landing at the Complete Angler, who should welcome her there with the utmost enthusiasm but Flo Furleigh, looking wonderfully pretty and apparently in the highest spirits? She not only was supremely delighted to see Dora, but she shook hands most warmly with the Colonel, and greeted Claymer with a great deal more cordiality than there was any occasion for—at least Dora thought so, but then she could scarcely be considered to be an impartial judge.

Dick Caverner was with her, looking somewhat glum—"and no wonder," thought Dora, "he must be well-nigh sick of the girl by this time"; Mrs. Tripmass—Dick's aunt—was there. They had had luncheon, and were just going to meet some friends in the town, and were driving back to Shiplake.

Miss Dora was by no means so cordial as she might have been; she said she must go in at once and change, for she had been out fishing all the morning, and "felt quite damp and scaly." Presently they all took their departure, and the Colonel and Claymer walked with them, gossiping as far as the gate. The former presently returned, and Dora saw him from her bedroom window walking up and down the grass-plat.

She noticed Ralph was not with him, and then, glancing towards the bridge, she saw Mrs. Tripmass and her nephew pass over it. Presently some distance behind, in apparently most earnest conversation and walking very slowly, were Miss Furleigh and Mr. Claymer. She watched the couple till they were out of sight, and then somewhat absently took up the volume of "Summer Songs" that she had discovered in the pocket of Ralph's

mackintosh. When carelessly fluttering over the leaves, she observed the following lines underscored :—

> Droop, droop, sweet little eyelids!
> Droop over eyes of weird, wild blue!
> Under the fringe of those tremulous shy lids,
> Glances of love and of fun peep through.

She, moreover, noted that these were initialed at the side "*To F. F. from R. C.*" She became very angry, she flung the book on the floor, she paced up and down the room, and resolved to have nothing further to do with Master Ralph.

That morning they had been very friendly; there had been a good deal of difficulty over lines and hooks. In the course of disentangling there had been a touching of hands and a gazing in eyes—oh, yes, Ralph could be very nice if he liked, and he was very nice that morning; besides he had a very musical voice, and you could talk so nicely when the weir was roaring. But to think that, after all, he must needs go flying off with that little coquette. Why couldn't she stay at Shiplake?

What did she mean by dancing over here with her silly airs and affectations? Who

wanted her here? And then it struck her that perhaps Ralph did. Oh, well, perhaps Mr. Claymer did—there was no accounting for *his* tastes. Well, at any rate, she was not going fishing again, and for her part she thought fishing a very poor form of amusement, with that roaring weir everlastingly dinning in your ears all the morning.

All this and a great deal more passed through the mind of the indignant lass, and when Ralph presented himself at the dinner-table he had no idea how greatly he had fallen in her estimation since the morning. The dainty damsel, in her crisp white dress and a single blush-rose, was looking very lovely; there was, however, he noticed, a somewhat dangerous sparkle in her eyes, and she made a point of sitting by Stillmere at dinner time and talking to and looking at any one but her devoted angler. Uncle Jack soon noticed during dinner that there was what he was pleased to call "a screw loose somewhere," and fancied that a change would be better for every one, and he announced that the expedition would once more be on the move the next morning.

Ralph did not show the least resentment on

account of the way Dora altogether ignored him and devoted herself to his friend, but made himself particularly agreeable to Miss Feyton and every one else. Once Dora caught his eye, which had a somewhat sorrowful expression, and she very nearly said something nice to him. But then her face flushed, and she declared to herself she could never forgive the way in which he seized the first opportunity of rushing off with "that artful designing little minx."

If Dora had not been so obstinate, if she had only shown a little more common sense and made herself somewhat more agreeable, she might possibly have learned what those two were talking so seriously about as they went over the bridge, and if she had discovered that, she would probably have taken a different view of all things. As it was, she went off early to bed, feeling very sorrowful.

The intense happiness she felt in the morning appeared to be, now, quite an event of her early life — something that happened very long ago, of which she seemed to be once more reminded as she listened to the sound of the rushing waters. The music of

the weir had such a joyous melody then, but now, alas, it seemed all changed.

There was an inexplicable sadness mingled with its melody. Those long lashes drooped a great deal, and the sorrowful maiden pressed a wet dimpled cheek on the pillow, and sobbed as if her heart would break. She longed to have her auntie to comfort her; she would have liked to make a confidante of Phyllis; but she did not exactly know what she should say to her aunt, or what she had to confide to Phyllis.

She felt a sort of companionship in the everlasting music of the weir, as it suggested the pleasant times of long ago in its sad song. Now they were real, presently they vanished; now they were near, and again they were far off. Now she seemed to lose altogether the feeling of fierceness in the lashing and seething waters, and no longer had a sensation of battling with the stream.

Then she seemed to float with the current and be gently wafted along; the hoarse voice of the river seemed to die away into a soothing lullaby.

So faint, so distant, so musical, so restful did it seem, so warm the sunshine, so beautiful

the country, so sparkling the river, that the little lass forgot all about her troubles and drifted peacefully away in the Land of Dreams.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH — *SUMMER SAILING*

> *"When the breeze blows, then the punt goes,*
> *Our hearts are all light and merry!*
> *When the breeze drops, then the sail flops—*
> *We row and feel angry, very."*
>
> PUNT POEMS.

"CHANGE of work is as good as change of air!" said the Colonel at breakfast time. "To-day we're going a-sailing and a-paddling ——"

"Trust it will be a good deal of the first and very little of the second," said Phyllis. "After all the hard labour of punting, I feel I should like to dream on cushions in an electric launch going at the very slowest speed."

"Well, if we have a fair wind, Miss Phyllis," said her uncle, "your Most Serene Lolling Laziness will probably be gratified. I have a letter from Tommy Turtledock this morning in which he says he left his sailing punt up here a fortnight ago, and he wishes I would send it or bring it down to Taplow. I was

up pretty early this morning, and directly after my swim I went round and saw it. It's a good-sized ship, and will take us all. I have started the *Otter*, with a man to scull her down to Skindle's. So, recollect," he added, thumping the table and trying to look severe, "all aboard by eleven sharp——"

"Oh, Uncle Jack," said Dora, pouting, "I can never be ready by eleven——"

"Very well! Anybody who is not ready by eleven will be left behind. And if you're left behind, you Baby, you'll be sent up to town by the 12.45 train. So now you know what to expect."

It is needless to say Dora and all the rest were in readiness considerably before eleven, and they were all in their places, with Guy and Ralph paddling and the Colonel at the helm, as the hour was being chimed from All Saints. It was another lovely morning, though the wind was freshening and the weather looked by no means so settled as it had been. They pass into the lock, there are only a few boats with them, so they are not detained long, and as they pass out of it they are borne along by the swift mill-stream from the left.

They hear the chimes again, the distant roar of the weir, the lash and gurgle of the stream close at hand, the rattle and thump of the mill, which constitute a new musical combination and a pleasing variety of the sonata that has haunted them for the last few days. They subsequently have the additional impetus of the stream from the old river, and go swiftly onwards, with the superb bank of foliage formed by the Quarry Woods on the right. Down by the water they see a lazy lass in a hammock, and another lass equally lazy who had climbed to a comfortable seat in a tree and is languidly reading a book. Presently, as they passed Quarry Cottage, the Colonel said—

"Nobody's mind has been improved lately—"

"Return of the irrepressible Barlow," remarked his wife.

"Be quiet, Child. I was going to tell you all about the lamprey fishery that used to exist here. We are told that no less than ten hundred thousand were caught in the course of one season in days gone by ——"

"The brother of Vitellius prepared for him a feast in which were served of fish two thousand dishes," said Phyllis, in a pompous

voice. "Ha! ha! ha! My dear Uncle Jack, you remind me of Doctor Blimber. Will nobody come to the rescue and cough like Johnson?"

Whereupon the whole crew coughed violently, and the Colonel said—

"Very well, then I won't tell you anything about my new company, the Thames Lamprey Fishery Company, that I am about to float, and none of you shall have founders' shares."

"There'll be more founder than float about it, I should say," interpolated Phyllis.

"Phyl, you're incorrigible," replied her uncle. "I see you're all on the frivol. So now I think, Stillmere, we might have the sail up." There was but little doubt that Tommy Turtledock's sailing-punt was a most comfortable craft in which to enjoy the beauties of the Thames. It was for a bunch of bonny girls, ranging from saucy six to sweet seventeen, who called the aforesaid Tommy daddy, that this punt was especially constructed. Therefore you may imagine it was pretty roomy and tolerably safe. It was, moreover, fairly light, and its sailing capabilities were excellent.

It possessed an enormous sail, which was tan-colour of exactly the right hue. It was neither

violent nor insipid, but seemed to harmonize perfectly with the surrounding scenery; the lee-boards were inside, almost like centre-boards, and the boom was hung high, so that there was no chance of pleasant musings being suddenly interrupted by violent blows on the head. The tint of the tawny sail was repeated in richer and more intense tones by the mahogany planks of the punt, which found an agreeable foil in the many and ample soft Oxford blue cushions on which the passengers lolled.

"Randan, waggonette, steamer, steam-launch, sailing-punt; we've used all these during our trip," said Dora, telling them off on her fingers. "One, two, three, four, five; and the last is the best of the lot. Why, pray, Uncle Jack, did we not have a ship like this before?"

"Because I should never have got you beyond Iffley Lock; indeed, I doubt if you could have got as far ——"

"Well, all I can say is," rejoined Dora, "I should like to have Mr. Turtledock for an uncle. *He* has some idea of comfort. These cushions are heavenly," she added, as she nestled down amid the well-stuffed, yielding blue pillows. "Now look at those hard, unyielding pads on which we silently suffer on

board the *Otter*. Well, well—Mr. Turtledock would be an uncle worth having ——"

"You ungrateful, mutinous niece," said the Colonel. "I've a great mind to maroon you on the first deserted island we come to. After all the trouble, too, that I took to make you an expert angler."

"Oh, Uncle Jack, Uncle Jack, you did nothing of the kind. You simply sat in the punt and read your newspaper, and roared with laughter when there was nothing whatever to laugh at. Did you ever disentangle my line? Did you ever bait my hook? Did you ever help me to land a fish?"

"The first two, certainly not," replied Uncle Jack; "the last I am not certain about," he added, with a roar of laughter.

"Oh, he's quite too silly, Auntie," said Dora, with a pout, as she turned her back on him.

"Well, at any rate, Dora, you gave me a mark of your confidence—a mark which I shall probably carry as long as I live—by putting your hook into my ear."

Then came a sudden gust of wind, which caused the punt to heel over and the ladies to start, as the Colonel was not keeping a look-out.

"All Dora's fault," said he. "How often have I told her she mustn't speak to the man at the wheel?"

The Colonel now took advantage of the freshening breeze, and the punt went along in fine style.

They had by this time come pretty well to the end of the woods, which gradually become thinner as they stretch away towards Winter Hill; they had passed the two islands on the right—so rapidly that the Colonel entirely forgot the idea of marooning his refractory niece—and had just got clear of the wooden viaduct of the Wycombe railway. They had a fair wind and plenty of it, and they rattled down that fine sailing reach by Bourne End in good style, noting as they go along, Camden Place, Abney House, Hedsor Cottage, and other pleasant residences on the left. After passing the Paper Mills and the tall chimney, the stream bears to the left, and you come in view of Cookham Bridge, while to the right may be seen the tower of Holy Trinity Church and the pleasant village of Cookham.

"Ah!" said the Colonel, "it always seems a pity that the old wooden bridge was demolished. There are two bridges that are

a distinct loss to the picturesque aspect of the Thames. One is Cookham and the other Putney; both were of wood, and both had features in common. What a favourite place this was with Frederick Walker. Don't you know his charming picture of Cookham High Street? He was buried here, and there is a tablet to his memory in the church. I have a picture of his that must have been painted in this neighbourhood."

Emerging from under the bridge the view is very charming. On the left you behold the woods of Hedsor and the sham castle known as Lord Boston's Folly, and to the right you look upon The Grove. Here the stream divides into four, and any one who is unacquainted with the geography of the place would be puzzled to know which one to take. They, however, all join once more below the lock. The stream to the left, which takes a long sweep by Hedsor Wharf and part of the grounds of Cliveden, is the old river; the one that goes sharp to the right turns Cookham Paper Mill, the one in front flows over Odney Weir, and the other to the left of this is the cut to the lock. Lowering the sail and taking to the paddles, they pass along the

latter, under a picturesque footbridge, whence three laughing girlettes look down upon them, and then into the lock, which the Colonel avers is not half so picturesque as the old one, but a great deal safer.

Once clear of the lock they again had the sail up and sailed slowly by the glories of Cliveden. In the estimation of many the stretch of something under two miles between Cookham and Boulter's Locks is the most beautiful portion of the Thames. On the left you have the delightful woods of Cliveden stretching almost from lock to lock; on the right you have, firstly, Formosa Island—said to be the largest island on the Upper Thames—with its pleasant tree-shaded mansion; then you catch a glimpse of Formosa Cottage, just where the millstream comes in; then comes Cliveden Ferry, and close by this the Colonel pointed out a spreading beech tree, under the shade of which they always used to take luncheon when pulling up years agone.

A little beyond this, and some distance from the bank, may be seen White Place. Leaving two or three osier-clad islands on the left, and Batlynge Mead opposite, and presently passing the junction of White Brook, the Colonel

begins to complain of the over-building which is everywhere threatening the more popular parts of the Thames.

Just before you bear away to the right to enter the cut you will notice on the left that the grounds of Taplow Court join those of Cliveden. Here the stream again divides into four, that on the Bucks side washing the grounds of Taplow Court, and afterwards turning the mill below; the next to it goes over the weir, and the third keeps Ray Mill going; while that close to the Berkshire bank, along which our friends proceed, is the cut which goes straight to Boulter's Lock. The lock was closed when they arrived, so they had to wait outside, which, however, gave them the opportunity of having a good view of this, one of the most picturesque locks on the river.

"In the old days," said the Colonel, "before boating became so universally popular, and before there were the crams and crushes that you have here now on Sundays, I used to think this spot an ideal residence. It was just the place where I could have settled down on a limited income with the girl of my heart."

"Jack," said his wife, "you never told me that ——"

"Didn't I, Child? Oh, I think I did. And you objected because you said you thought it would be damp."

"I never did anything of the kind," she replied, biting her lips and shaking her head. "You never gave *me* the chance. You're a bad man."

"He is, Auntie," said Dora, "the very ideal of a wicked uncle."

"Yes," said Phyllis, regarding him with that softened frown that Stillmere thought so bewitching. "Did it ever strike you that he is very like Harry the Eighth, with a strong touch of Bluebeard? A good thing you didn't go and live with him at the lock-house, Auntie, or he would have dropped you into the mill-race after dark, and made love to some susceptible and unsuspecting lass who passed through in her canoe the next morning." And she went on singing in that sweet voice, modulated almost, as it were, to a whisper—

In your canoe, love, I'd be a tripper,
  If you were skipper and I were mate;
In your canoe, love, where sedges shiver
  And willows quiver, we'd navigate!
Upon the river, you'd ne'er be lonely,
  For, if you had only room for two,
I'd pass my leisure with greatest pleasure
  With you, my treasure—in your canoe!

"Oh, yes; I know him. He's a bold, bad man—that's what he is!"

"After all, not half a bad place to settle down in," said Stillmere as they passed in. "Why, you ought to make a fortune out of the roses alone," he added, regarding the lovely garden, which was at its best.

"Might have been done years ago," replied the Colonel, with a portentous sigh, "provided your wife had been contented with simple print frocks. But, nowadays—impossible! Your acquaintances would soon find you out, and the number of thirsty people who would call going up and down would absolutely ruin you, in drinks alone, during the first fortnight of the summer season ——"

As it was, they met several people they knew in the lock.

"Don't like this," said the Colonel, when his hat had been off for the fourth time, "it's like returning to civilisation. I hate returning to civilisation. There's too much civilisation and too much building according to my ideas, about this part of the Thames."

There is a good deal in what the Colonel said, for, while the Bucks side of the stream, with Glen Island and Taplow Woods in the

background, with the various green eyots and the eel bucks, remain pretty much as they ever were, the Berks shore, with its many villas, gives quite a suburban character to the bank between Raymead Hotel and Maidenhead Bridge.

All lovers of the Thames will be inclined to look upon Mr. Astor as a public benefactor to its banks because he steadily discourages building, and most people will wish he had arrived in these parts long ago and bought up all the land in the neighbourhood and saved it from the irrepressible builder. We certainly require a Conservancy which shall look after the picturesqueness of the Thames as well as other matters, and one that will prevent the river degenerating into a mere water street, as it most assuredly will if the ravages of builders and speculators are not sharply checked.

With the swift stream and a fair wind it did not take them long to reach the pleasant haven of Skindle's, where they paused for luncheon. And a very merry luncheon it proved to be, though it heralded a break-up of the crew, for the Colonel and his wife and the two girls had promised to dine and pass the night at the Evenlodes' bungalow, which was

pleasantly situated near Bray, while Stillmere and Claymer were to stop at Skindle's, bring the *Otter* down the next morning, and call for their friends. There was plenty of time; the Colonel's party were not due at their friends' till seven o'clock, and so they were able to lounge on the lawn, to watch the passing boats, and eventually the ladies had tea and the Colonel and his friends smoked.

As the party were likely to separate, if only for a little while, Dora had become somewhat forgiving, and had actually condescended to be something more than ordinarily civil to Ralph. They were slowly walking up and down the lawn, chatting on various topics, when suddenly Claymer said—

"As I shall not see anything of you till to-morrow, would you mind my asking you something?"

"It depends upon what it is," answered Dora, with her eyes sparkling.

"Well, it's a matter of considerable importance to ——"

"To you or to me?"

"Well, more particularly to Miss Furleigh."

"Well?" she rejoined impatiently, and with a frown.

"She told me the other day that she had lost a book, which, for some reason or other, was of great importance to her, which she said she *might* have left in the mackintosh I lent her some time ago in a shower up at Castle Eaton. I didn't think it was likely to be there; but then I remembered your saying there was something in the pocket that day we parted at Shiplake Station, and I said you might have everything you found; and so I thought ——"

"I took you at your word, Mr. Claymer," said Dora, blushing. "I have the book in my bag upstairs. I am very sorry; I ought to have returned it to you before. I will go and get it."

And before he had time to say anything she had rushed off, and he did not see her till they were all ready to walk over to Bray together. A very enjoyable stroll they had, for the day was just beginning to be pleasantly cool; they paused for a considerable time on pretty Maidenhead Bridge, and then they departed in the direction of Bray. The Colonel and Phyllis walked on briskly, and they were followed by Mrs. Torneywayne and Stillmere, and a long distance behind came Claymer and Dora. The latter seemed

rather reserved and sad, and Ralph had all his work cut out to keep the conversation going.

They presently looked up, and saw the others waiting for them at the turning to the Evenlodes' bungalow, and then Dora said, as she handed a little parcel to Ralph—

"Here is your property, Mr. Claymer. Forgive me for not returning it before ——"

Before he could reply they had reached the rest of the party, and everybody was very busy saying good-bye.

"Well, you'll have a little freedom to-night, you chappies," said the Colonel, "and be able to enjoy yourselves. Wish I could be with you!"

"Jack, I'm ashamed of you!" said his wife.

"Don't take any notice of him, Mrs. Torneywayne," replied Ralph. "He knows we shall be dull enough. Good-bye, Miss Daynflete." He shook hands with her last of all.

"Good-bye," said Dora, with a laugh. "I like the idea of *you* being dull;" and then she added, in a undertone, "Why, you'll have plenty of time to add some fresh annotations to the book."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH

## *A BUNGALOW AT BRAY*

*"A life that's pleasant, easy, careless,*
*A house that's simple, sunny, stairless!"*

THE O'BUNGLE.

THEY received the warmest of welcomes from the Evenlodes, and were charmed with the picturesqueness and general arrangement of the bungalow. It differed considerably from many such buildings, as it had a good-sized plot of ground attached to it, which its owner had converted into an excellent garden. The house, too, was remarkable in having a very wide, light verandah, so that in fine weather the inhabitants passed the greater part of their time out of doors. Except when it was very wet or cold, and for sleeping purposes, the interior of the bungalow was but little used. In fact, it was as an open-air residence the place chiefly found favour.

"Directly it seems too cold to sit under the verandah," said Mrs. Evenlode, "we begin to think it is time to go elsewhere. Sometimes we have been here from May to August; at other times we have stopped but a little while. One wet season I can remember we only remained a fortnight, and during that fortnight we all had such a series of frightful colds that we had to take a lengthened sojourn abroad before we recovered."

There is no doubt that bungalow-life by the Thames is something like houseboat-life, indescribably charming when the days are sunny and the nights are warm, but when days are dull, and when the mist wreaths up and hangs in white clouds o'er the valley at eventide, both these methods of residence are to be avoided. The evening of our friends' visit was well-nigh perfect; the air, which was just beginning to stir after slumbering in the glorious sunshine all day, was fragrant with the scent of hay and of flowers; there was no suspicion of damp or of mist, there was not a cloud in the sky, the slight breeze was dry and balmy.

The dinner-table, which was laid under the verandah facing the river, looked in

the highest degree attractive. The glinting glass, the glittering silver, the gleaming table-cloth, the artfully-folded serviettes, the bouquets in old Worcester vases, the minor arrangements of roses, formed such an attractive picture that Mrs. Torneywayne became enthusiastic in her admiration.

"It's all done by the children," said Mrs. Evenlode. "Whenever we come down here they look after these things. It amuses them and gives them experience, so that, if ever they have houses of their own, they will know how things ought to be done. They naturally seem to have good taste, and I think this practice improves it."

"What an excellent idea," said Mrs. Torneywayne. "I certainly never saw a table better set or flowers more tastefully arranged. Where are these little artists?"

"Well, they can't be far off, because we dine at eight; they're probably in some mischief or other. Come and walk round the 'estate' before dinner."

They took a turn round the admirably kept garden in which Mr. Evenlode took the greatest delight, and then they strayed into a small plantation which was dignified by the

name of "the forest." There they heard chattering and giggling up a tree.

"Come down, you children," said Mrs. Evenlode, "and see Mrs. Torneywayne. It's time you got ready for dinner."

Presently there was a vision of shapely sable-hosed legs, of snowy frills, and of pretty print frocks, and three maidens, all apparently about eleven years old, all with Titian-tinted tresses, and all with the lovely complexion that usually accompanies such hair, descended to the ground.

"You're nice sort of parlour-maids, upon my word," said Mrs. Evenlode. "Come, kiss Mrs. Torneywayne, and get ready for dinner as quick as you can."

And with that the three scampered off with their beautiful hair streaming behind them.

At dinner-time these lasses appeared in white pinafores, and waited on the guests with close attention and refined grace. You may be sure the Colonel had a good deal to say to them, and many a joke passed as they handed things to him, and he offered them large salaries to come and wait upon him, provided always they could get a good character from their last place. It was a mighty pleasant

dinner, the little girls thoroughly appreciated the Colonel's jokes, and, as their mother said, never before waited so badly; but it was all the Colonel's fault.

"Add some fresh annotation to the book! What on earth can she mean?" said Ralph to himself, as he and Guy, after parting with their friends, turned in the direction of the village. He, however, was not allowed much time for reflection, for he was speedily bustled up by his friend, who was anxious to see what they could of Bray before the evening had too far advanced. They were just in time to look in at Saint Michael's Church, and, though it was getting too late to thoroughly appreciate the interior, with its fine brasses, notably that of Sir John Foxle and his two wives, they were enabled to get a very fair idea of the building.

They strolled quietly round, and some one was playing a voluntary on the organ, a tender, dreamy air, interpreted with great feeling, which seemed singularly in harmony with the stillness, the dying day, and the sweet atmosphere that pervaded the place. They paused in the porch for a while, till the organist brought his playing to an end. There was

none of the roaring aggressiveness about his performance that too often accompanies the players on this powerful instrument. The air seemed to get fainter and fainter, and appeared to gradually die away in the twilight, and was lost in the faint flutter of foliage outside.

"I should have liked Phyllis—I mean Miss Feyton—to have heard that," said Guy.

"Yes," answered Ralph, "I think she would have found an excellent *motivo*, as musicians say, for one of her improvizations. She would have made a sort of 'Twilight Sonata' out of it, and played, as she alone could play it, on the guitar on the river, a still summer evening like this, it would be something delicious."

They strolled quietly on as far as Jesus Hospital, the picturesque red brick almshouses founded by William Goddard—whose monument they had just seen in the church—more than two centuries and a-half ago, with its quaint flower-decked quadrangle and its ancient chapel. This was the spot where Frederick Walker is said to have completed his famous work, "The Harbour of Refuge."

His first idea of the picture, however, was

derived from a far less romantic spot, namely, Soho Square. It was there that he made the first sketch, and his idea of the general effect of light and the statue in the centre was derived from the stone effigy of King Charles the Second, which was subsequently removed and now decorates the grounds of Mr. W. S. Gilbert's country house at Harrow Weald. They wandered about here for a time, and as the sun went down they got almost the identical effect that can be seen in the famous picture..

They then lounged back to the George and had some excellent ale, lighted their pipes, and were ferried across to the Bucks side and walked leisurely towards their hotel. They could see on the other side various bungalows which were just beginning to be lighted up. The evening was so still, and sound travels so clearly across the water, that Guy fancied he could detect Phyllis's voice, and Ralph imagined that he could hear Dora chattering. One thing there was no doubt about, and that was Colonel Torneywayne's laugh. It came ringing right across the river in its heartiest tones, and awakened a subdued but sympathetic echo from his two friends. It was pretty late when

they sat down to dinner, and the night was so lovely that they subsequently remained very late upon the lawn. And Stillmere said to his friend, giving his own version of certain lines—

> Now after dinner—passing praise—
> Regretting fleeting summer days,
> 'Tis sweet to meditate and laze,
> And as one kindles
> The big post-prandial cigar,
> My friend, be thankful that we are
> At Skindle's!

Though Stillmere and Claymer had a somewhat quiet and contemplative evening, their friends at the Evenlodes had a most lively time. Several people looked in from neighbouring bungalows,—among them a Captain Cleret, whom Dora, who was in a more coquettish humour than ever, succeeded in making miserable, and a Mr. Vayner, who was evidently charmed by Phyllis's grace, who, however, regarded him with an amused dignity which made her even more attractive.

The night was simply perfect, and after dinner they sat out of doors, they chatted and smoked. Some of the girls played and sang inside the big room, and presently they brought out a guitar and begged Phyllis to sing. She sat on

the steps of the verandah, and as the guitar was somewhat different to her own, she played a most delightful prelude to get herself in touch, as she said, with the instrument. When she had mastered its capabilities and gained its confidence, she sang to a marvellous setting of her own, "The Hammock Lullaby," which was a great favourite of her uncle's—

O list, O list! as she softly sings,
To sweet leaf-music and slowly swings;
O gaze, O gaze! on that winsome face,
The fair young form and its girlish grace:
A sweeter picture you'd ne'er espy,
Mid rustling leaves, 'neath the summer sky—
        In fair July!

O the rook, the brook, and the dragon-fly,
All join in the laziest lullaby!
    As she sings and swings,
    And she swings and sings—
        In calm July!

She then played an interlude of extraordinary beauty in the most exquisite harmony, and sang the concluding stanza with more pathos than usual, putting the most tender feeling and variety into the final lullaby refrain.

Mr. Vayner was most enthusiastic in his applause, and Mrs. Torneywayne began to think it was time she played at being the

dignified chaperon, so, after hunting out Dora from "the forest," whither she had wandered with Cleret, with a strong sense of her auntly responsibility she packed both her nieces off to bed.

## CHAPTER NINETEENTH — *CANOE CONFIDENCES*

*"The rushes bend low where the bright ripples gleam,*
*And sweet are the secrets that sleep in the stream!"*
THE SECRETS OF THE STREAM.

THOUGH Stilimere and Claymer were somewhat late in going to bed, they were up in good time, for they bore in mind the Colonel's injunction that they were to call at the Evenlodes at eleven sharp, and just after ten their voices echoed under the centre arch of Maidenhead Bridge.

Ralph leisurely sculled down past the long narrow eyot screening the fish weir, under the arch of the Great Western Railway, having pleasant glimpses of The Fishery on the right and Orkney Lodge on the left, and eventually they sighted the Colonel and his party waiting on the right bank. There were three tawny-tressed, short-petticoated, sable-hosed, snowy-frilled lasses romping about, and there was a

smart young man who appeared to be paying a great deal of attention to Phyllis—which made Guy look very stern—and there was a laughing youth—"a giggling fool," Ralph called him in an undertone—who seemed to be having an excellent joke with Dora, and both our friends in the boat thought there was a great deal too much delay in starting.

However, at last they were off—the three men rowing. Dora declined to take her usual place in the head of the boat, but a very attractive bouquet of beauties the three passengers made was the opinion of more than one of the rowers. They are soon in Bray Lock and quickly out of it, the Colonel calling their attention to Amerden Bank—now a private house—on the right.

"Charming little inn that used to be," said he. "Everything as good as it could be. The landlord, Mr. Franklin, was a *real* landlord. Looked after everything himself. Wore a nankeen waistcoat and a blue tie, waited on you himself, poured out ale in a style even finer than Dr. Blimber's butler did. And such ale it was—my word, I could drink a pint of it at this present moment. He was a staunch

Conservative of the rare old-fashioned school, too, and it was as much a treat to listen to his sentiments as to stay in his house."

Soon after this they get into a rapid stream by Bray Mead, and as they approach Monkey Island they probably find one of the swiftest bits on the river. Whilst they have been debating whether they will land or not, they are carried too far to make it worth while to return. However, they get a pleasant peep of the picturesque fishing lodge—built by the third Duke of Marlborough and decorated with grotesque monkey-pictures by Clermont—with its background of poplars.

And after passing Queen's Ait a series of houses may be seen on the left bank. Among them may be mentioned Oakley Court farm, then Down Place, where at one time lived Jacob Tonson, the publisher, who established the Kit-Cat Club. The place has been greatly enlarged since Tonson's day, and the portraits of the members of the club by Sir Godfrey Kneller which used to be here, now belong to a descendant of the famous publisher, and are hung at Bayfordbury, in Hertfordshire. Next is Oakley Court, then The Fishery, then passing The Willows and through Ruddle's

Pool, subsequently may be seen Surly Hall, so inseparably connected with Etonians and the Fourth of June.

On the right a glimpse may now be had of Boveney Court in the distance, and nearer to the bank the quaint little ancient church of Saint Mary's embowered in trees. Boveney Lock is next reached. Afterwards you see the Windsor racecourse on your right, presently "Athens," the bathing-place of the Eton boys on your left, and then the river makes a sudden bend to the right, and you have a picturesque view of Clewer Court, Saint Andrew's Church, the Rectory, and the surrounding village of Clewer.

Just beyond you pass under the Great Western Railway bridge and behold the well-known picturesque clump of elms on the Brocas, and hence you have a fine view of Windsor Castle. Possibly it is from this point that you see the noble pile to its greatest advantage. There is something superbly regal in the calm dignity with which the grey majestic mass of building towers above the warm, red roofs of the town that clusters below it. From situation, association, and architecture it is beyond all doubt the most impressive of our

palaces, and from no place does its sky-line appear more striking than when viewed from the point already referred to.

Presently Firework Ait is passed on the right, and they come to the series of landing-stages and boat-houses, where they pause a while to pick up Stillmere's canoe, which they take in tow. They then proceed under Windsor Bridge, which connects Windsor and Eton, leaving the old river which goes over Romney Weir to the left; they pull down the cut, which has the long strip of land known as Romney Island on one side and the South-Western Railway and public recreation ground on the other. After they have passed through Romney Lock there is a fine view of Eton College and the playing-fields.

At the end of the latter the stream sweeps to the right under the South-Western Railway Bridge. In close contiguity to this is Black Potts. Shortly Victoria Bridge is reached, then the Home Park is sighted on the right, and the bright picturesque village of Datchet may be seen on the opposite shore. Beyond this may be noticed several pleasant mansions and gardens on the bank, and to the right may be observed a cluster of buildings which

constitute Prince Albert's model farm. A little below Albert Bridge crosses the river, and beyond this on the left may be seen the entrance to the old stream. Here they paused for a while.

"Now," said the Colonel, "we go along the artificial cut to the lock. Through that opening to the left is the old river, and very pretty it is. It would, however, be a good ghostly place to go along of a dark night. It is called Colnbrook Churchyard."

"Why?" asked Phyllis.

"Because, in the time of Claude du Val and other highwaymen of those days, they used to put their victims into sacks with heavy stones and drop 'em into the Thames round that bend. If you go along there of a moonlight night, no doubt you would see a rare collection of ghosts of the past, dancing about the stream and gibbering among the rushes. Some one ought to make a good story out of it."

"Don't, Uncle," said Dora, "you make me feel quite cold and creepy!"

"Oh! it's right enough in the daytime—I've been there often—but you wouldn't catch me there after twelve o'clock at night. Listen,

Dora," he added, putting on a melodramatic tone—

When the moon shines bright with a ghostly gleam,
And the spirits sneak in the sulky stream;
When the rushes rattle with raucous rhyme,
And twelve rings out from Saint Peter's chime!
Then the stream runs back and leaps up the weir,
And the fishes faint in a gruesome fear;
When weird is the song of the brindled bat,
And vague are the views of the water rat;
Then the ghosts so gory drift to and fro,
They mow and gibber, they gibber and mow ——.

"Stop him, Auntie, he's quite horrid!" said Phyllis.

"Why, Phyl, my dear," said her uncle, "you ought to be greatly obliged to me. There's another hint for one of your improvizations."

"I only wish I could explore it," said his niece, "then I might possibly be inspired and able to produce something quite shuddery in a minor key. Don't you think a 'Ghost Gavotte' might be effective?"

"Yes," said the Colonel, "something after the fashion of the Ghost Melody in 'The Corsican Brothers.'"

Stillmere immediately said he thought it would be an excellent notion, and, as he was well acquainted with the navigation, offered to

take Miss Feyton down in the canoe. She immediately fell in with the proposition, and though her aunt was somewhat doubtful of the wisdom of the proceeding, it did not take them long to put it into execution.

"There's a swift stream and you'll be there long before we are," shouted the Colonel as they started, "so order luncheon at The Bells and it will be ready by the time we get there."

The *Otter* then proceeded in most leisurely fashion along the cut. They were detained some time outside the lock, and so were very late in arriving at their destination.

Below the lock the river somewhat changes its character. It is well wooded on the right-hand side, and you catch a glimpse of Saint Peter's Church, then the Hermitage, and then The Priory, all more or less embowered in trees. Presently The Friary, Grove House, and Watergate Cottage may be seen, and then we get a good view of the well-known and picturesque hostelry, The Bells of Ouseley, under the shadow of the fine old elms, and the wooded slope of Priest's Hill in the background.

On landing they find no trace of the

explorers, neither has luncheon been ordered, so, whilst it is being prepared, the Colonel gives various reminiscences of the neighbourhood, and relates anecdotes concerning a notable landlord who at one time had the place, and the very fine old Lichfield ale which he always reserved for his special customers; he tells them all about the famous gudgeon-fishing that he used to have in this neighbourhood. When luncheon is well nigh over they see Guy and Phyllis leisurely landing. They are full of excuses; they have a deal to say concerning the peril of the voyage, and tell a marvellous tale about their being stranded on a shallow, which nobody believes, but which causes the Colonel to roar with laughter.

"Did you get an inspiration in a minor key, Phyl?" asked the Colonel.

"Well, I certainly got an inspiration, Uncle," answered his niece, smiling as if the inspiration had been rather a pleasant one, "but I don't know about it being in a minor key."

"Did you find the river *was* haunted after all?"

"Well, I'm not sure," replied Phyllis, looking grave for an instant, "who can tell?"

Who can tell, if the River is haunted by ghosts,
  Do goblins gyrate, where the slim sedges shiver?
Are loosestrife and lilies e'er crowded by hosts
  Of fairies who frisk where forget-me-nots quiver?
Are there brownies who boat in a bubble and laugh,
  Or pixies who play in the sunshine undaunted?
Are there spirits and imps, full of mischief and chaff?—
  Who can tell if the River is haunted?

*Two* can tell—if they would—of a fine summer's day,
  When fast their canoe, on a shallow, was stranded;
When they whispered and gazed, and though time sped away,
  They neither expressed the least wish to be landed!
To the music of leaves and the song of the stream,
  The dragon-fly flashed and the kingfisher flaunted;
While the sun brightly shone on those moments supreme—
  *Two* can tell, that the River *is* haunted!

After luncheon, as there was no particular hurry and Phyllis had never seen Saint Peter's Church, Stillmere undertook to be her guide thereto. Claymer and Dora, who already seemed to be better friends, had taken the canoe and were out of sight behind the eyot above. The Colonel was anxious to make some repairs on the rudder, which he thought did not work so easily as it might, so he was very busy smoking his black clay, hanging his head over the stern of the boat, getting very red in the face, and occasionally making forcible expressions in a whisper when he got the

smoke into his eyes or rapped his fingers with the hammer. His wife sat in the boat and kept him company, smiling from time to time at his misfortunes.

"Now, don't worry any more about it, you dear old Jack," said she. "We can easily have it put right when we get to Staines. *Do* have a little rest. Smoke your pipe in peace and talk to me. I declare I make a much better Joan than you do a Darby. You're much too frivolous, too energetic for a Darby. I tell you what, Jack, I am beginning to feel a responsibility, an *awful* responsibility about these young people ——"

"Oh! it's all right, Child. There's nothing serious, *I* know!"

"No, you men never know anything. As for you, Jack, you never were serious ——"

"Well, I know, I was serious once—and repented it ever since ——"

"You bad man!"

"Well, Phyllis and Stillmere were certainly a long while in Colnbrook Churchyard, and now they're gone—so they say—to explore another churchyard. They've been there long enough now to learn all the epitaphs by heart. That canoe will certainly lead to no good.

There are the other two in it now. Oh dear, oh dear, who *would* be an uncle? But what am I to do? Shall I caution Stillmere and Claymer against the machinations of my pretty nieces, and tell them to take warning by *Me?* This Awful Example ——"

"No, you old silly; don't be ridiculous. Don't *you* interfere, or you're sure to muddle matters. It wouldn't be a bad thing for the girls after all ——"

"Of course it wouldn't. I know all about Stillmere and Claymer ——"

"I never saw Phyllis so taken with any one as with Mr. Stillmere. She has had lots of good chances, but she usually treats mankind with a graceful and dignified scorn. As for Dora, I don't know—she has been very strange with Mr. Claymer lately. She is well-nigh as silly and childish as her namesake in 'David Copperfield.' She has a good heart, but she's such an incorrigible little coquette that she is likely to offend even a more patient and good-natured man than Mr. Claymer. She's sometimes so provoking, such an absolute big baby, that she ought to be well whipped and sent to bed," added Mrs. Torneywayne, with a flash in her eyes and flourishing the tiller ropes.

"Who are you threatening so fiercely, dear Auntie?" said Dora, as they paddled by.

"*You*, of course," replied her aunt, with a laugh.

"Oh, then, I won't stay," answered Dora. "What a time the others are! May we paddle on a little way?"

Mrs. Torneywayne looked doubtful, and shrugged her shoulders, but the Colonel shouted—

"Yes, go along! Don't go through the lock. We'll catch you up. A good riddance of bad ——"

"Uncle Jack, Uncle Jack, your poor little down-trodden Dora is used to such unkind speeches, but it is very rude indeed to your unfortunate guest, Mr. Claymer!"

The canoe had just disappeared round the corner, when Phyllis and Guy returned, and it did not take long for the *Otter* to be once more *en route*.

A little distance beyond The Bells on the right the river quits Berkshire for Surrey, and a very pretty bit of scenery you get between here and Egham Lock. On the right may be seen the fine timbered eminence, Cooper's Hill, and on the left Magna Charta Island,

where it is said King John signed Magna Charta getting on for seven hundred years ago. This may or may not be the case, but, as Runnymede is only the other side of the river, there is very good reason for supposing that it was signed here or hereabouts.

At any rate the spot is marked by an ideal summer residence, close to the river, and with superb views up and down. Then we come to Ankerwycke. You cannot see anything of the house from the river, but you can see the fine trees at the corner, and the superb chesnut that dips its leaves in the river and forms a cool secluded bower on the hottest summer day.

"Here," said the Colonel, "Harry the Eighth is said to have wooed Anne Boleyn, and they say there are still some ancient trees remaining that sheltered the Royal lovers, and the Ankerwycke trees, I fancy, have sheltered a good many lovers other than Royal in their time."

Whereupon Phyllis began to sing—

The chesnuts droop low by the river,
  And shady are Ankerwycke trees;
The dragon-flies flash and they quiver
  To somnolent humming of bees!
Oh, chesnuts are shady and golden are sheaves,
And sweet is the exquisite music of leaves!

"Ah!" remarked the Colonel, "there used to be a wonderful chesnut hereabouts that was often utilised for flirtation purposes in my young days, and I dare say is so still. Ask your auntie if she doesn't recollect it. Here it is! No, we've passed it!"

Where chesnut leaves dip in the stream,
Well shaded from the sunny gleam,
'Tis just the spot to muse and dream—
In this our friends agree!
Thus leaves fall back as they pass through,
And patter on the light canoe;
Then screen them both from passing view,
Beneath the Chesnut-tree!

The party in the *Otter* little thought that, besides passing the famous chesnut, they had passed Miss Daynflete and Mr. Claymer, who were entirely hidden by its foliage. They heard the *Otter* go by almost close to them, and every word that was said by those on board was distinctly audible.

Ralph put his finger on his lips, and Dora raised her hands and shook her head, and a merry twinkle lit up her eyes, as if she were thinking, "All this is very wrong, but it's very nice, and I rather like it." The little lass looked prettier than ever as she sat in the head of the canoe. She took off her hat,

and her fair hair, with its irrepressible curl, shone like a nimbus against the background of bright clear green, made by the sun striking through the broad chesnut leaves.

I would that I could sketch for you
Sweet Dora lolling in canoe;
Whose eyes of winsome watchet hue,
Are brilliant as can be.
This dainty, dimpled, merry maid,
Now laughs and queens it in the shade,
And likes flirtation, I'm afraid,
Beneath the Chesnut-tree!

What artist could attempt to trace
The wondrous charm and child-like grace
That swiftly change this April face
From sadness into glee?
Or limn that golden, curly crown,
The long dark lashes drooping down,
Or paint that pretty puzzled frown,
Beneath the Chesnut-tree!

When the measured plash of the oars of the *Otter* had died away in the distance they resumed their conversation.

"Do you mean to tell me that you never before read 'Summer Songs' belonging to Miss Furleigh?" said Dora.

"Of course not," replied Ralph; "never even heard of it till you gave it to me to return the other day."

"And you never underscored some nonsensical lines about 'Droop, droop, sweet little eyelids'?"

"How could I?"

"Ha! You don't say you didn't. Perhaps, as you appear to be such a *confidential friend* of Miss Florence Furleigh, you may be able to tell me who her '*always affectionate R. C.*' may be?"

"Well, I think I could make a very good guess."

"Oh, you think you could, could you?"

"Yes; I should say it is the man who is fortunate enough to be engaged to her ——"

"Oh, indeed," she remarked with assumed indifference. "And who, pray, might *he* be?"

"Well, if my information is correct, *R. C.* stands for ——"

"Yes, yes—well, what *does* it stand for?"

"Don't be impatient! 'R. C.' stands for 'Richard Caverner'—good-natured, long-suffering, much-enduring Dick. And you were nearly the means of breaking off the engagement because you kept Miss Furleigh's book, and he was furiously angry at her having lost it."

"Ralph!" said Dora, as she bit her lips.

"Dora!" exclaimed Ralph, as he dropped the paddle and took her hand.

> And for a moment, she's put out,
> But you will find, there is no doubt,
> That Ralph knows how to cure that pout;
> I'm very certain he—
> When Dora tries to pout in pique,
> And dimples play at hide-and-seek—
> Knows just the language lips should speak
> Beneath the Chesnut-tree!

And then ——

Presently the screen of leaves is once more pushed aside, and a couple of very happy young people go rapidly paddling down in the direction of Bell Weir—

> The maiden is happy, with faith she receives
> The tale that is told to the song of the leaves.

There is a good swift stream here; they proceed quickly, and it does not take them long to reach Egham Lock.

They were somewhat alarmed to hear that the Colonel had been inquiring if they had passed through, and to find how long it was since he went down. So, directly they got out of the lock, they both set to work and paddled their hardest. They were also helped by a stiffish bit of stream below the weir, and went flying along at a tremendous pace. They

were so intent on their work and in getting along as quickly as possible that they scarcely gazed at anything on the banks. They passed the junction of the Colne on the left, then the high picturesque horse-bridge on the other side, and were speeding away past some thickly planted eyots on the left when they heard a shout.

"Hi! hi! Stop, you runaways! One would think you were rowing a runaway match." They recognised the Colonel's voice, and then there was a chorus of voices crying "Stop! Stop! Stop!"

They had shot by, but they soon put the canoe about and saw the Colonel, who appeared to be enjoying himself tremendously. He had been hailed by his old friend Johnnie Ripplemore, who had one of the most convenient and picturesque bungalows on the river, and the whole party were sitting on the lawn taking tea and strawberries and cream. Of course the delinquents were full of excuses. Ralph laughed and Dora pouted; they were not quite clear what the Colonel had said; they had been looking everywhere for the *Otter*. Of course no one believed them in the least, and Auntie scanned Dora closely,

and noticed a subdued manner about her and a softened lustre in those blue eyes from which she drew her own conclusions.

"Do you know, Mrs. Ripplemore," said the Colonel to his hostess, "I've been doing nothing but lose nieces to-day?"

"Ah! it's always the way on the river," she replied.

"Of course it is," added her husband. "Why, look at this island, for instance. Of an evening here it is quite surprising how people get lost, and the most extraordinary thing is that they're always missing in couples. Now you're here, of course you'll stay to dinner?"

"Can't possibly, my dear fellow. Can't risk losing any more nieces. Besides, we're bound to get home to dinner!"

Notwithstanding all the hospitable persuasion of the Ripplemores, the party once more started. The Colonel was very stern. He said he would have no more nonsense with that canoe. So it was towed behind, and all the crew occupied their original places, and the passengers were in their usual positions; even the wilful Dora was meek and submissive, and curled herself comfortably in the head of

the boat. And so they said good-bye to their friends, and started on the final phase of their tour.

They all felt somewhat sad to think they had arrived at the last stage of the expedition. Stillmere and Claymer had talked of going up to town from Staines, but the Colonel had insisted that they should "see the thing out" and dine at his house and stay the night. At first his friends had protested against this, but one is inclined to think that a good deal of which the general public knew nothing had happened between Windsor and Staines that caused Guy and Ralph to alter their original determination.

The Colonel pointed out London Stone, and he had plenty of amusing gossip about Staines and its neighbourhood. He then began to talk a great deal about the entertainment at the Evenlodes; he expatiated on the merits of Captain Cleret and Mr. Vayner, and he asked Dora what she thought of the first, and enquired of Phyllis whether she did not admire the second.

All this time they were drawing near the end of their journey. They had passed beneath Staines Bridge and the South-Western

Railway Bridge; they had gazed upon the new church and the villas on the left, regarded Truss's Island on the right, and they had arrived at Penton Hook Lock. Here the Colonel tells them about the long *détour* that is made by the Hook and how it leads to the Abbey River. Dora has the effrontery to say she would like to explore it, and actually asks Ralph if he will take her round in the canoe. Whereupon the Colonel pulls out his watch and says—

"No, certainly not! We're rather late as it is. It'll be dark before we get home. You're sure to get shipwrecked, and enough mischief has been done with that canoe already. If we had never picked up that canoe to-day we should have been all right. Good evening!" he added to the lock-keeper as they passed out. "There! we're out of our last lock."

"The last, Jack?" said his wife. "Why, there's Chertsey lock to come ——"

"Yes, I know, Child, but we're going to land at Laleham Ferry. George will take charge of the boat. I've told Weatherbrow to meet us at the Abbey. It'll give us a nice little walk this fine evening, and I must say we haven't overwalked ourselves this trip."

Mrs. Torneywayne looked a little bit sad, for the pleasant voyage seemed to be coming to an end even sooner than she expected. Whilst they had been talking they had caught a glimpse of Saint Ann's Hill, and she fancied she could make out the trees surrounding their house in the distance. Presently the picturesque village of Laleham is in sight, and the quaint church of All Saints may be descried, and beyond may be seen the trees of Laleham Park, and Osmanthorpe is slowly passed. There is a feeling that the journey is really coming to an end, and there is a disposition among both crew and passengers to prolong it as much as possible.

The stream runs fleet, the air is sweet
  And redolent of happy haytime:
The balmy breeze scarce stirs the trees,
  To sing the song of summer playtime!
And as we glide at eventide—
  How sweet the voice of passing maiden!
The roar of weir—now far, now near—
  The laughter in the punt, lass-laden!
The tender song that cheers along,
  The brown-faced sculler in the wherry!—
Our port's at hand, for we must land
    At Laleham Ferry!

We drift away, as fades the day—
 The oars shimmer in the shy light—
The night draws nigh, the saffron sky
 Is merging into tender twilight.
While glinting bright, some village light
 Is gleaming gladly in the gloaming:
The boat's made fast, we land at last,
 And say good-bye to River-roaming!
The trip is o'er, we step ashore—
 With feelings the reverse of merry—
Gone in the sun, the day is done
 At Laleham Ferry!

The *Otter* is steered across to the right.

"Easy all!" says Auntie, following the command by "Ship!"

Laleham Ferry is reached, and the voyage is at an end.

## CHAPTER TWENTIETH — *WELL ROWED ALL!*

*"Good-bye to the River! The pleasure*
*Of sweet summer days is now past;*
*The lounging, the laughing, the leisure,*
*And sunshine is over at last!"*

THE SALADMONGER.

IT was perhaps one of the finest evenings they had had during the trip when they regretfully left the *Otter* and strolled leisurely up the hedge-shaded pathway across Laleham Burway and subsequently along the causeway of the Abbey Mead.

Passing over the Abbey River and through a wicket into the lane, they find their old friend the waggonette, with Weatherbrow at the horse's head, Weatherbrow looking especially well and smiling, Weatherbrow touching his hat in all directions as if he were playing on some new kind of musical instrument which required thoughtful and elaborate fingering, Weatherbrow evidently delighted to see the entire company.

It did not take them long to drop into their old places, for the Colonel to grasp the reins and drive off through Chertsey. Chertsey is a place that does not change much. It still retains a fine flavour of old fashion, and it appeared to especial advantage as the mellowness of eventide was becoming gradually merged into the clear celadon of twilight, and melting into the peaceful beauty of sweet moonlit summer night. Lights were beginning to be shown in many of the windows, and not a few hats were touched as the well-known equipage passed along Windsor Street, down Guildford Street, and sped away in the direction of Saint Ann's Hill.

They left all trace of the town behind them: they passed through pleasant country lanes and by occasional cottages and farmhouses; the air was redolent of the sweet perfume of flowers. Presently this became more powerful, and the travellers were conscious of overhanging trees and of ancient brick walls; there was a sharp turn to the left, the glimmer of a light, more overhanging trees making the way well-nigh dark, then a vision of lighted windows, then a grinding on the gravel, a brilliant light under a porch, damsels in white aprons and a groom.

The waggonette came to a sudden stop. Auntie was down in an instant and borne away indoors by two little lasses in white; the Colonel went in after her. Guy handed out Phyllis and Ralph took care of Dora. Presently back came the Colonel.

"Very sorry, boys," said he, "to be so rude. Everything upset by a couple of babies. Look here, you know we're very late. Can all you young people—girls, I mean, as well as boys—dress in half an hour? Because the dinner will be on the table then. And if it is kept waiting the cook—whom I wouldn't lose for any money—will give warning. Come along, boys, and see your rooms!"

It was astonishing how quickly everybody dressed that night. Every one was ready directly the gong sounded, and it would have been difficult to have got together a better-looking lot of six people than assembled in that fine, old-fashioned dining-room, with its picture-hung walls, on the night referred to. Despite it being the last night of the trip, every one seemed in excellent spirits and every one appeared to especial advantage. They had only known one another a few weeks and yet they now seemed to be very old friends, and the

meeting that occurred in Trewsbury Mead only such a short time since seemed as if it might have taken place years ago.

The Colonel was in excellent form, and his reminiscences of the trip and the humorous light in which he regarded it were highly appreciated. He did not fail, moreover, to refer from time to time to the excellent qualities of Mr. Vayner and Captain Cleret, and he had a good deal to say on the subject of canoes, the delay they caused, and the mystery they occasioned. It was altogether one of the merriest dinners they had had, and made a glorious termination to a most enjoyable trip. All the incidents and reminiscences of the voyage were passed in review, and the recapitulation was a source of very great amusement.

"The success of the expedition," said the Colonel, "may be embodied in a simple phrase familiar to all watermen and watergirls, namely, 'Well rowed all!'"

"Good!" said Guy, as he glanced at Phyllis.

"Capital!" said Ralph, as he looked hard at Dora.

"Why, my dear old Jack, you're getting quite epigrammatic!" remarked his wife.

"Well, the best cure for that is a good smoke, so come along, boys!" said the Colonel as he marched his friends away.

After what had recently taken place Mrs. Torneywayne was surprised to find on what excellent terms Dora and Ralph appeared to be. At least, she would have been surprised had she not read her niece's eyes as easily as if they were a book in big print when she returned with Claymer to the Ripplemores. She did not view Phyllis's apparent friendship with Stillmere with such wonder, as she had never seen her so taken with any one before, and she had observed the liking growing steadily ever since the meeting outside Inglesham Church.

It was a lovely evening, and coffee was served out of doors under the verandah, where the men smoked. The moon was up. It was clear, dry, and brilliant. They could see the white dresses of their hostess and her nieces gleaming amid the bushes as they walked the other side of the lawn. Everything was still. There was only the very faintest intermittent breeze; occasionally there was the distant bark of a dog, the clang of a far-off chime, and either the faint flutter of foliage or the softened roar

of a weir, or perhaps a mixture of both. The three ladies presently return across the lawn.

"Well, Jack, you *are* lazy," said Mrs. Torneywayne. "What a perfect night it is!"

"Yes, so it is, Child. And the only way to enjoy it is to sympathize with it by being perfectly tranquil," he added, as he blew forth rings of smoke that went curling above his head.

Mrs. Torneywayne sat down. The two young men stood up, and presently by some singular combination of circumstances they drifted across the lawn with the two girls. The Colonel smiled and touched his wife's hand. They presently saw Phyllis and Guy turn one way, and Dora and Ralph the other. The Colonel smiled still more and gravely shook his head. The grounds were pretty extensive, and so it was not to be wondered the young people were a long while gone.

The Colonel had finished his pipe and his wife was saying it was getting late when Ralph and Dora returned, saying they had been looking for Guy and Phyllis. Presently the latter couple came back, Guy striking a match, and looking at his watch by the light of a vesta, said "he had no idea it was so late."

Auntie noted by the momentary glare the face of her eldest niece, and thought she had never seen her more beautiful or with such a thrilling expression.

"Phyl, my dear," said she, "if you're not too tired, do sing something. It is our last night," she added, with a sigh, "do give us a treat. Here's the guitar!"

Phyllis sat down at once, and commenced a symphony that was entirely new to all of them, and then began singing in a very low voice, before they even realised the song had commenced. The poem was a beautiful one, entitled "Still Summer Night." The setting was worthy of the poem, for it was throughout most admirably treated by the musician; she put so much feeling into the plaintive parts, and so much passion into the whole of it, that none of her audience had ever heard anything like it before.

There was unlimited joy in it, but at the same time there was a subtle undercurrent of sorrow occasionally, that was singularly touching. The final verse seemed to die away and came to an end on the refrain "Still—Summer—Night," sung very slowly and almost in a whisper.

Auntie was in tears, and even Uncle Jack had a lump in his throat and began to cough.

"Thank you so much, my dear Phyl; it is the loveliest song I ever heard. And now, it's time for all of us to go to bed," said Auntie. She felt she did not wish the charm that had been thrown over the whole party to be dispelled. The same idea occurred to all of them, and they all wished one another good night.

After the young people had gone, and Auntie was about to retire, she said to her husband—

"Ah! well, and so this is the end of our trip down the Thames?"

"No, Child, I don't think it is!"

And it wasn't.

THE END.

PRINTED BY
WM. HODGE AND CO.
GLASGOW

# *BOOK LOVERS' CLASSICS.*

## PRESS OPINIONS

### *On "THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD."*

*MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.*—"A beautifully printed and wonderfully cheap facsimile."

*GLOBE.*—"A very attractive edition."

*CHURCH TIMES.*—"Beautifully printed, tastefully bound . . . . it would be difficult to conceive a more worthy representative of Goldsmith's immortal work."

### *On "GULLIVER'S TRAVELS."*

*MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.*—"A marvellously cheap and taking reprint."

*TIMES.*—"The book is handy in shape, and the print is excellent."

*PALL MALL.*—"A verbatim reprint . . . exceedingly well bound."

---

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD. *By* OLIVER GOLDSMITH, with careful reproductions of the whole of the Illustrations by WILLIAM MULREADY, R.A. A facsimile and verbatim reprint of the First Mulready Edition. 320 pages, large crown 8vo.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. *By* JONATHAN SWIFT, with reproductions of the original plates. A verbatim reprint of the First Edition. 320 pages. Uniform with the VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.

CRANFORD. *By* MRS. GASKELL, with sixteen full-page Illustrations, specially drawn for this edition by T. H. ROBINSON, and separately printed on the finest-surfaced plate paper, and inserted in the volume. 320 pages. Uniform with the VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.

---

⁂ *The above works are all re-set from new type, with title-pages in red and black, designed by* J. WALTER WEST, *and are printed on choice paper, and bound in two styles:*

(*a*) Cloth extra, gilt lettered on back, gilt top, and gilt panel on front, *price* 2/6.

(*b*) Cloth extra, gilt lettered on back and front, gilt edges, and profusely decorated with gold on front and back, *price* 3/6.